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Tremendous Adventures

TREMENDOUS ADVENTURES

BY

DION CLAYTON CALTHROP

Author of "Clay and Rainbows," "St. Quin," etc.

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FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
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TO
MARY VIOLET
CLAYTON CALTHROP

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Tremendous Adventures

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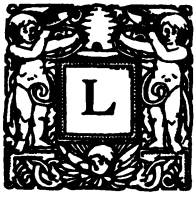
CHAPTER I

THE ENCHANTMENT OF MR. FROGMORE

I



LET it be said at once that Mr. Frogmore was the sole owner of the firm of Frogmore, Jallut & Wishcorn, Wood Pulp Merchants, Cheapside. Mr. Jallut had gone the way of all flesh, and no one missed him, because he had been a nasty, disagreeable old man who never seemed to have a clean handkerchief. And Mr. Wishcorn, whom nobody in the office had ever seen, had sold his interests to Mr. Frogmore, and was rumoured to be living a gay life in Paris at the age of seventy-two.

In those days everyone, or nearly everyone, drove to their place of business, and for forty-one years Mr. Frogmore drove from the ugliest house in Wimbledon to his offices

in Cheapside, dressed always in a short frock coat, a black stock, and a top hat very tall with a thin, nearly flat brim. In addition to this his black tight trousers were strapped under his half-Wellington boots, and a silk bandana hung out of one of his coat tail pockets. Perhaps the only light thing about him was the fact that he wore eight rings, all mourning rings, some with hair in them, some with black enamel angels weeping over black enamel weeping willows. It gave the impression of a man going about with his dead friends on his fingers.

A groom, who looked like an undertaker, sat behind him on the high gig, and he gave the impression that if any person insulted his master he would be killed and buried immediately without being sat upon by the coroner.

London in those days was a curious place, full of curious-looking people: any number of men in startling tartan waistcoats, with the loudest of loud trousers, very tall stock ties, and all remarkable for their own peculiar variety of whisker.

Mr. Frogmore's concession to fashion was to use Macassar oil, part his hair down the back and brush it forward in two large curls above his ears, such curls going by the name of knockers; that, and exquisite linen.

Had you called in the way of business at Messrs. Frogmore, Jallut & Wishcorn, the thing which would have most surprised you would have been his head clerk. Henry Belton was a six-foot tawny-coloured giant with an irrepressible smile, and a strong trace of West country burr in his voice. He had been in the firm for twenty years, having come into it at the age of ten, to dust, clean, light fires, do the windows, put papers orderly, run errands and sleep under a counter. He had regarded Mr. Frogmore as a sort of gloomy emperor laid under the spell of wood pulp, for he had that touch of mysticism of the West country which gave him to understand that cattle could be overlooked by undoubted witches—he has thrown a stone at one himself; that there were places better not visited by moonlight; and that milk curdled in a mysterious way

because, as his mother told him, some odd being had passed that way by night.

Between Henry Belton and his employer no word excepting upon business had passed in all those twenty years. Mr. Frogmore knew that Henry's father was a blacksmith at Thithercombe near to Exeter. He knew that Henry had come to him exceptionally well educated for those days; and he knew that seven years before this time Henry's father had died, because Henry had informed him of the fact and had asked permission to bury his father. Permission had been granted, and there the matter ended.

At the ordinary where Mr. Frogmore dined every day, or rather partook of a chop or steak with a pint of sherry to it, he was no more approachable than he was at the office. He ate, drank, and lived alone.

Now few people but his old servants knew how very lonely Mr. Frogmore was, nor did they realise the cause of it. Forty years ago Mr. Frogmore had his one crowded hour of glorious life—the crowded hour lasted three months to be precise. He had loved and his

love had been returned. He had, with the whole strength of his strong nature, been devoured and consumed by the divine fire, and Sophy Curlet had died. Mr. Frogmore had died too then in spirit; nothing was left of his fire but ashes. He vanished and came back to the world and the house he had bought for her a thin, hard-looking man, and not one of his father's servants dared to speak to him.

He was then an orphan, having no relations but two old aunts who gave him caraway cake and cowslip wine once a week while they lived, and a wild brother somewhere out in the world who had nearly ruined the business and then had bolted with a considerable sum of the firm's money and someone else's wife.

It was at this time that Mr. Frogmore took up an attitude towards life which was rather the attitude an iceberg might take up to a cloud of butterflies. He worked frigidly, almost cruelly against his competitors in business. He built up the firm's business, bought out Wishcorn, and would have

bought out Jallut but that death bought him up first. He enlarged his warehouses, his staff, went far afield in his ventures, never took a holiday, never appeared to be tired, never had an illness, and yet, though none knew it but himself, never laid the ghost of that all-devouring passion of his life. There was one thing and only one thing he allowed himself, and that was roses. She had been like a rose. He had declared his love for her in a manner most ungentle for those times when she was wearing a rose-coloured dress. The soft candle-light in the drawing-room, the heaviness of the furniture, the hard glitter of beadwork-covered chairs had accentuated the swaying grace of her figure. Her father, who was a doctor, had been called out hurriedly; Sophy, an only and adored child, broke all the rules of convention, and had entered the drawing-room to tell him so. They knew at once. She, shivering like a leaf in a storm, was in his arms. The terrific furnace within him burst into flame. His ardent deep voice poured a torrent of words over her, protestations of tenderness, of all

they would do together; words of sheer poetry, unrehearsed sentences, passionate fervour at her beauty, sentences which shook her, to which she gave no answer till she gave her lips.

Then silence broken by the voice of her father, a curious sentence for those severe days, "Be very good to her."

And she died.

Small wonder that Mr. Frogmore cast a chill wherever he went. Small wonder, perhaps, that only in his roses did he recover a glimpse of that roseate dawn of life from which he had been so abruptly awakened into the horror of eternal solitude and darkness.

To the fashionable horror of those days he laid but one pink rose on her coffin and left the funeral without attending the most expensive feast the doctor could afford an excited, scandalised family.

He liked Henry Belton, though Henry Belton never knew it; he knew he trusted him, but affection would have seemed bizarre in the case of Mr. Frogmore.

In his natural calculations as to the future disposal of his money Henry Belton entered; he would leave him more than a competence, do the handsome by him, but the bulk of his fortune was to go to found the Sophy Curlet Horticultural College, special attention and a special grant to be devoted to roses. The man was a poet in hell.

II

At the time of which we are speaking, and on May the second, Mr. Frogmore drove as usual to his place of business, descended from his gig, passed into his inner office and sank into his chair. Only by a supreme effort of will had he got so far, now that the effort was over he felt that the room was whirling round him and that his heart must stop.

He rang his bell, and when Henry appeared he told him to send the boy out for a pint of brandy.

"You are not well, sir," said Henry.

"I never felt better in my life," Mr. Frogmore replied.

"The brandy shall be fetched at once, sir," said Henry.

"I have a great deal of private correspondence to attend to," said Mr. Frogmore, "and I will not see anybody to-day."

To the boy's surprise Mr. Frogmore said "Thank'e" when he arrived with the brandy, so surprised that he confided in the most junior warehouse clerk that he had a feeling that promotion stared him in the face.

Mr. Frogmore sat at his desk gazing vacantly at the wall before him with a peculiar unaccountable feeling that his mother was in the room, and she had been dead these fifty years. He had worshipped her but had never but once said so, these things were not done. She had always smelt of sandalwood and of Rowlands Kalydor; and when she sat down she and her huge crinoline used to occupy an entire small sofa.

This won't do, said Mr. Frogmore to himself, and he poured out a stiff joram of neat

brandy and swallowed it at one gulp. The world came slowly back into its place. He addressed himself to his letters.

It was remarked in the office that Mr. Frogmore sent out for his lunch and that he left it nearly untouched, especially by the boy who devoured a cold steak, chipped potatoes and two glasses of sherry behind a packing-case with great gusto. It was very much noticed by Henry, who had, in the course of the day, to visit the inner office on several occasions and found Mr. Frogmore gazing into vacancy as if he were in the company of ghosts, which, indeed, he was.

Sophy! her adorable chignon, her pork pie hat, her little feet with arched insteps showing demurely in elastic-sided boots, Jemimas. Ghosts! His great-grandfather, a horse-toothed man with a tie wig who appeared to live in a cloud of snuff. His Aunt James who gave him a spade guinea, the very coin he wore now on his fob. His Uncle Charles Arthur who made a fortune in linen and spent it on women and horses, who was not even afraid of his father. His father, that

man seemingly made of steel, decorous, polite to an insulting degree, who regarded a knowledge of French as effeminate, who was found dead at the age of seventy-nine in a back room in the "Seven Dials," where gentlemen who supported "The Fancy" put up purses to see a prize fight with bare fists.

Why did they come round him now, Mr. Frogmore wondered. Then, with that iron will of his, he finished the day's routine, had his letters entered in the letter book, looked at the sales book, tested his bank balance, pencilled a date for a deal, arranged for half a dozen interviews in the following week, and half an hour later than usual drove home to Wimbledon the same grim, saturnine gentleman as usual, feeling inwardly that the distance was a million miles and that he might drop off the box seat at any moment.

At the door of his house he paused, a feeling of weakness and an intolerable fluttering of his heart caused him to steady himself, one hand against the door, the other at his heart.

The feeling of giddiness passed and he

opened the door and came into the hall with a sense of relief.

The hall was in the extreme mode of his day, designed for Sophy, built for Sophy, adorned for her. A staircase rose right and left; at the foot of either staircase stood a Muse in plaster holding aloft a gas jet sheltered in a round white globe. Where the stairs met a landing there was on each side a window filled with very dreadful stained glass. Two or three ornately carved chairs stood about, and an occasional table held various hat brushes, several pairs of gloves and a neatly folded woollen muffler.

To-night it all seemed vaguely unfamiliar, and as Mr. Frogmore passed into his study the same sense of unreality came to him. He knew he must see his doctor, a man whom he had not seen for two years, at which time he had sprained his ankle.

He rang the bell and listened to the slow footsteps of the old butler crossing the hall.

"Soames," he said quietly, "send one of the men to Doctor Mingles and ask him to kindly step round here at his earliest con-

venience; add that it would give me pleasure if he joined me at supper."

"Very good, sir," said Soames, wistfully looking at his master. Then he added, greatly daring: "Are you not quite yourself, sir, this evening?"

"Never better," said Mr. Frogmore.

Mr. Frogmore sat in his study just as he had done for thirty-five years, in the same leather armchair with the small pembroke table beside him on which stood a biscuit box and a decanter of Madeira. Over the mantle was a crayon drawing of his mother with a fashionable simper on her face, a simper that had never been there. Before the fire, which was lighted, was a long fire stool. On the walls were half a dozen fine engravings of ruins—people adored ruins in those days—and two walls were taken up by a bookcase from floor to ceiling containing hundreds of volumes richly bound, that being the reason for which they had been bought.

The room had an austerity which was very pleasing, a sense of rich quiet, of a heavy immovable plenitude of the world's goods,

the comfort of the polished surfaces of good mahogany, and the dignified smell of leather and soft feel of Turkey carpet, and thick silk wine-coloured curtains about the windows. Moreover on the double writing-desk which stood in the centre of the room was a bowl of pink roses.

To commemorate one's love in growing things, that was a rare, a fine thing. To think that year after year, unconscious of the thought that they were pilgrims to a shrine of deep devotion, people would move about his Sophy Curlet Gardens paying homage to the woman he had once held in his arms, who was his heart's darling, the keystone of his life!

Mr. Frogmore mused as he sat waiting until they should tell him his hot water was ready on that beatitude of love called memory, not that he put it in so many words, or even ranged it in any orderly series of thoughts, but he sat there occupied by the atmosphere of Sophy Curlet, feeling very strange, very unlike himself until the footman, Belger, entered and in the hushed voice

he had used for fifteen years on this occasion, said, " Sir, your hot water is in your room, sir."

"Thank'e," said Mr. Frogmore, and he rose from his chair.

A few minutes later the doctor was shown into Mr. Frogmore's dressing-room.

III

Supper was served in the large heavy dining-room which was papered with maroon and hung with unctuous pictures of dead game in company with lobsters and lemons cut in half; of dark and gloomy landscapes in which dimly seen nymphs bathed in almost black pools, and such-like pictures then collected.

The supper was of the order of the day, thick soup, a turbot, a sirloin of beef, a brace of ducks, a trifle and custard in beautiful cut glass, marrow bones, and dessert with damson cheese, and brandied cherries. Claret was drunk during the meal, followed with much solemnity by fine vintage port.

The doctor was a cheery soul, fond of his food and wine, one who always as the saying was "cut and come again"; and he was also a great chatterbox and on this occasion did all the talking. It was the time when Worth the dressmaker was the last cry. The doctor had heard that he always appeared in a white cravat, and black coat with the gold buttons to fasten his batiste shirt cuffs; he knew also that Worth preferred to dress ample women. He spoke of the second Great Exhibition which was due in a year; of the sudden rise of a new Punch artist, George du Maurier; of hearing at a kettle-drum or five o'clock tea, that a certain Miss Dash had been seen driving alone in a hansom-cab; in short he talked of everything except the one thing which hovered over the dinner table, Death.

They rose and went into the study. Mr. Frogmore lighted an Indian cheroot, the doctor did the same.

"Now tell me," said Mr. Frogmore.

"Absolute rest and change for three months," said the doctor, now quite serious.

"My business?" said Mr. Frogmore.

"If it is well organized can go on without you."

"That is true. Am I in any danger?"

"My dear sir," the doctor replied, "you have worked your system to breaking point. Your heart is in a very bad way, a very bad way. If you put any strain upon yourself, physical or mental, you would be in very grave danger, very grave danger."

"I should die suddenly."

"Yes."

"I have always wished to die suddenly. Do you recommend some such place as Harrogate or Bath?"

"I suggest," said the doctor, now sitting down, " a retired spot in the south of Devon, Amblemouth to be precise, where there is a good family hotel kept by an old servant of mine. It is quiet, the air is mild, there is plenty of shipping in the harbour and many beautiful drives. The cooking, I may say, is perfect, is quite perfect, country food of course, eggs, cream, trout, good sea-fish, you understand, and a very tolerable cellar, a

very tolerable cellar. A few books, the daily paper, not too much smoking and a mixture I will prescribe for you, and in three or four months you won't know yourself."

"Three or four months," Mr. Frogmore said in a low tone.

"And now, my friend, I must take myself off and you must get to bed. In half an hour, if you will send one of your servants, the medicine will be ready. I am not unhopeful. I have seen many a man take a new lease of life after three or four months of absolute rest. Good night. I will see myself off the premises."

After a cheerful bustle the doctor was gone and Mr. Frogmore gazed into the fire. "Three or four months," he thought aloud. "Liar. I could read my sentence in his face."

CHAPTER II

CONTINUES THE ENCHANTMENT OF MR. FROGMORE

I

LESS simple, less direct man would have announced to his head clerk that he was going for a slight change and expected to be back in three or four weeks, and would have prolonged his stay by letter; not so Mr. Frogmore. He arrived in his usual manner at his offices at nine o'clock and sent for Henry Belton.

"Belton," he said, "you will take charge of the firm for the next four months. I am going to leave you a power of attorney. I shall arrange with the bank this morning."

"Yes, sir," said Henry, schooled in his master's ways.

"I am raising your salary by two hundred pounds."

Mr. Frogmore noticed the sudden flush, the leap of delight in Belton's face. He put it down to money; but, in fact, had he but known, the flush came from anticipation. Henry Belton was in love, of which more anon.

"Henry," said Mr. Frogmore, using the name for the first time in twenty years, "you have been a very true, faithful servant and you shall not go unrewarded. I shall be dead in three or four months and you will find all instructions in my safe."

"But, sir——" Henry began nervously.

"Have you anything to say?" said Mr. Frogmore in his clear bitter voice.

"Yes, I have, sir," said Henry, boldly plunging. "I have been with you, man and boy, for twenty years, and I'm a man who gets fond of people, I can't help it, and——"

"Thank you, Henry. Send for Mr. Almond, Mr. Brisket, and the ledgers. I leave London to-morrow."

"Very good, sir."

As Henry was about to leave, Mr. Frogmore's cold, precise voice called him back.

"You are a Devon man, are you not?"

"I am, sir."

"Do you know of a place called Amblemouth?"

"I do, indeed, sir."

What is it that changes a man's whole appearance, his utterance, his years of restraint when his local patriotism is aroused? Henry did not see Mr. Frogmore, nor did he see the office, but he saw Amblemouth with its tree-bedecked harbour, its narrow twisting streets, its river unfolding loveliness after loveliness at every bend, its college, ships, churches, market place, old houses, breathed its very air, smelt its fuchsia hedges, heard the soft delicious burr of its people. He spoke of it, unknowingly with a poet's frenzy, his voice going back to the accent of his childhood, and suddenly realised the calm, critical smile of Mr. Frogmore bent upon him with eyes so chill and forbidding that he came to his senses and felt as if he had dropped off a cliff into icy water.

"It seems a pleasant enough place."

"I'm afraid I was rather carried away, sir," said Henry nervously.

There was a long pause before Mr. Frogmore spoke in a surprisingly gentle way. "Go on being carried away, Henry. It is not a fault, as some people think. Wait. It has suddenly occurred to me that you might understand. When I die you will find in my will, which you will execute, that I have left a large sum of money with which to found a Horticultural College. You will find that it is founded in the name of a lady. I want, if you understand me, to have the place very gentle, as if it were guided by a young woman's hands. The tuition will be free as if it were a gift from a young woman's heart. I want it, indeed, if it be possible, to be a sort of University of Flowers, as if it were the quaint conceit of a young woman.

"All the scheme is laid down in detail. In course of time this College should pay its way. It will have a laboratory where scents can be made, particularly rose scent. It will grow vegetables and flowers for sale. I am

founding a Chair which will be held by a woman. It sounds, I expect, very unreasonable, Henry, but like you I was once rather carried away. You are asked, at a definite salary, to visit this place four times a year. I have tied you down to nothing else. But I am doing now what I never thought to do in my lifetime, or speak of to any living soul; I am asking you to care for this place, to give it a place in your affections. Good-bye. I do not think you will see me again."

Mr. Frogmore said these words in a calm, level, unemotional voice, with no sign in his face of the great difficulty he had in saying them, but Henry noticed that he suddenly put his hand to his heart and that his face twitched as if he were in pain.

At five o'clock Mr. Frogmore left the office, stopping at Henry's desk and holding out his hand. He gave Henry no opportunity to say the words which were waiting on his lips, but passed out quickly and silently to the waiting gig and the grim groom.

II

As became him, Mr. Frogmore posted to Amblemouth by way of Exeter, and quite unknowingly had one of his horses shod at the very smithy where Henry's father had been blacksmith and where Henry as a tiny lad had watched the sparks fly from the anvil.

It was May, sweet-scented May, and the hedges rang with the eager choir of birds.

At the risk of tedium we must tell how the road ran in those days, though it still runs, but the spelling of places was different. The attention of travellers was drawn more to the seats of noblemen in that Royal England than to the views. Patronage and the picturesque were the habit of the day. A broken-down, thatched cottage, smothered in flowering creepers, in which a large family was condemned to live on ten shillings a week, was pointed out as being charming and delightfully picturesque and the subject for many water colour drawings; and the blunt-looking large white or red houses with

parks like vast lawns were pointed out as Seats, as they were indeed, being armchairs in the most part.

The road driven over by the grim person who dealt with the comfort of Mr. Frogmore's horses wound out of London by Brentford and Staines and so to Bagshot. From Hyde Park Corner to Exeter it was reputed to be one hundred and seventy-two miles, and from thence to Amblemouth thirty-three and a half miles. It passed through places thrilling with the history of many, many years, like Middle Wallop, Abbots Ann, Oddstoke, Winter Flow, passed by cross roads leading to Wine Caunton, Stour Provost, through Crookhorn, Evil or Yeovil, passed into Somerset by way of Babilon Hill, and so to Exeter, Totnes and Amblemouth.

Mr. Frogmore, as did all travellers by road, gave witness to the majestic richness of the land. Here and there he passed a night and a day in market towns where hiring fairs were in progress, and labourers and domestic servants stood in rows in the

market places, and were picked out by their lords and masters. Quack doctors and fat cattle, itinerant dentists, outside auctioneers, street singers and vendors of the local cakes or pasties added their voices to the babble of sound, the crack of whips, the oaths of farmers, the jokes of clowns on stilts, and the general pleasant confusion of affairs.

Leaning back in the carriage with a shawl about his shoulders, Mr. Frogmore watched the pageant of the country. Leisure was to him very strange. Nobody seemed to hurry about their work. Italians with organs and monkeys, Frenchmen with muzzled bears gave an odd twist to the road, almost mediaeval, considering the great shining stallions, their tails and manes decorated with coloured cotton ribbons and devices in straw, met and passed these strangers just as they met and passed them in the fourteenth century. Life to Mr. Frogmore had been buying and selling in the retirement of the city, and the country had an almost indecent suggestion of sex about it. It was a little open,

a little coarse to the eye of a man who dealt in trees, and had never seen a forest.

Life, as unfolded by the road, offered a vastness which made the city appear a little contemptible. It was so rich in possibilities. May mornings with sun bathing aged oaks, great chalk downs, bringing to life Brimstone butterflies, touching the tan on country cheeks, adding a zest to the pint of good ale at a wayside inn decorated as a rule with the arms of a centuries old family; heralding the cuckoo whose persistent cry rang spring into the ears, all Nature, as it were, rejoicing in her abundance, in her fertility, in her shameless sense of reproduction, her vast sympathy with the world's children, buds or babies, legitimate or illegitimate; all these things ran through Mr. Frogmore's veins like new and heady wine.

Outwardly precise, self-contained, he was the Mr. Frogmore of Frogmore, Jallut & Wishcorn; inwardly he was a strange child of the name of Stephen who was having his first great adventure.

Somehow Sophy seemed to be holding his mind's hand, and he relinquished himself to the joy of being guided by her spirit. It was obvious to him that she had been acquainted with these joys. It was obvious to him that the near approach to Death was giving him his first real vision of Life. The love he bore for Sophy had been, as he now saw, a torrent without a background; and few people would have known the Mr. Frogmore who sat down to saddle of mutton, apple tart, and real Cheddar in the New London Inn at Exeter.

For the first week Mr. Frogmore was occupied in shedding the city and finding a new skin. He had so far unbent that he had ordered from his tailor a pepper and salt suit to be made and sent down to him, and even, as there was no one to see who mattered, had purchased a bird's eye neckcloth and an ash stick. At the end of the week the suit arrived and, behold, a new Mr. Frogmore viewed himself in the cheval glass, a new Mr. Frogmore said "Thank'e" to the comely bobbing maid who waited upon him

in his private sitting-room, and a very new Mr. Frogmore sat bolt upright in a skiff and was rowed by a waterman known as Silent Jim, up the Amble to Totnes.

Mr. Frogmore kept on wondering why he had never done this sort of thing before. Here, at a small expense, was beauty for nothing, to use an Irishism. The May was in flower; here on the market day came maids with daffodils and kingcups; golden wallflowers and violets, the cowslip or Peter's Keys, and the pale husky scented primrose, which is, again to be precise, the primerose or first rose.

Flowers, as we know, appealed to Mr. Frogmore, but these flowers, these lavish gifts of Nature free for any hand to pluck, starring the earth with their melody of colour, sweetening the year in their delicate way before England became rapturous with the warm song of June, these flowers entered into the heart of Mr. Frogmore and helped to melt the armour he had put about it in the hour of his agony.

The season was ripe for the unfolding,

after all, of Mr. Frogmore; and when, one day, that really unlettered man lit upon a copy of Shakespeare's Play, and, reading idly, came upon this sentence, his cure was nigh complete:

"O, Lord who lent me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness."

The simple essential facts of life are to a shy mind so embarrassing that many men and women prefer to live as if they did not exist. Mr. Frogmore, after the death of Sophy, had tried to be a very competent machine; dealing thus hardly with mankind he had become hard himself, but the hardness was but the casket of a broken heart, and memory, the mother of dead children, held him in thrall. In fact, he began to ache.

The sense of beauty is the superlative activity of the mind. It is that note upon the violin which breaks a glass tuned to the same vibration. Mr. Frogmore began to see the graciousness of life, the pale primrose of early dawn, the scraping of God's palette on the skies at sunset, the feminine grace of

full-rigged ships, the calm of still days which only birds appeared to break with song, the beautiful distress of trees in wind, the humble supplication of young buds for the sun. And Sophy seemed to be the burden of it all.

Mr. Frogmore sat day after day at the window of his sitting-room, overlooking the harbour, pondering on his attitude towards life, life from which he had deliberately exiled himself years gone by. He had no friend, yet here, in this quiet place, where everybody went about their work as to the manner born, he felt surrounded by friends. It was understood that he was in ill-health, and countless courtesies were delicately shown him. For nothing. No price can buy affection, no sum can pay for it.

His little needs were anticipated; his humours were excused.

One day, and quite by accident, if there be such a thing as accident, he took coach to Stake Cellars, a little corner by the sea used by smugglers even then; curious that lace, diamonds, or brandy gave an alluring risk to men's lives; and there descending, walked a

few paces back up a gentle slope and came upon a tollgate house and a smithy, empty and deserted, with the garden all grown up and rambling. It stood there like a stray cat asking to be stroked, a pitiful thing which once had held the destination of human beings, whose windows had glowed with firelight, whose door had admitted the gamut of human aspirations into the lowly abode. The house, whether from its shape, or size, or position, looked lonely, more so than ordinary houses because it had been built to suit or discommode the comfort of wayfarers.

Mr. Frogmore passed through the rotting gate, which led into the entangled garden, for no express purpose but out of an idle curiosity. He found that it concealed a gateway, also in disrepair, on which the word " Private " was still dimly visible. He opened the gate and found himself looking down a deep, wooded valley through which a stream murmured through reeds into a lake, and after a step or so he turned round and saw the sea and a golden-pebbled beach.

The stillness was not chilling, it was friendly, it invited repose. Chaucer could have looked upon that valley and found himself at home. It had no trace of the hand of man. It seemed guarded, reserved, free from the contamination of eager, pressing Time. A few sea-gulls flew overhead, uttering that weird cry which sounds as if they mourned dead mariners. A linnet began his song and stopped abruptly. A stoat crossed almost by Mr. Frogmore's feet, eyed him with its criminal eye and vanished noiselessly into the enfolding bracken.

This was the real beginning of Mr. Frogmore's enchantment, for this place was known locally as the Happy Valley.

III

Mr. Frogmore found a grassy bank, carefully spread his handkerchief on the grass and sat down. Almost at once he felt a sort of golden glow running through him, a feeling of drowsy delicious content. His hearing became curiously acute so that he

heard, or thought he heard, soft whispering all about him and very beautiful music. "Insects," he said, trying for the moment to shake off the spell, but the spell remained.

He could not remember when he had last thought of his childhood, but he could see himself now in yellow nankeen trousers, white socks, a little green jacket and a loose shirt with a frilled collar. He saw himself seated on a high chair in his father's study, his tall, stern father who nobody guessed had a second life of boxing, cockfighting and puncheons of hot rum. He could see him now in a blue coat with brass buttons, cutting the pages of a book with a paper-knife supposed to be made of wood from the Mount of Olives, taking snuff with great deliberation, and smoking a long, black churchwarden pipe. His wild brother must have inherited his gaming, reckless spirit from the hidden side of Mr. Frogmore, senior.

He had been a very lonely boy, never playing with other children, never romping or stealing other people's apples from their

orchards as his brother did; loathing church because his brainless mother thought of Christianity as a drawing-room accomplishment, and vaguely persuaded in her vague mind that there were crimson plush seats in heaven, and wondering quite seriously if the golden stairs would strike cold to bare feet.

Mr. Frogmore warmed to the sun as a green-gage does, he mellowed; he let himself go and luxuriated in the feeling of quiet comfort just as a patient does in the slack contentment of convalescence.

The most inconsequent memories floated at their leisure through his brain; the comfit box which stood on a little table in the drawing-room with pink and white sweets in it, caskets for caraway seed; the Pope Joan board: two stuffed fish his father had got over a bad debt; the smell of apples and bacon which, coming from one of the upper rooms, sometimes pervaded the house.

With this sense of well-being, warmed by the May sun, lulled by the drowsy hum of insects, Mr. Frogmore allowed himself to drift into that state of mind in which a man

wonders what his life would have been like if he had treated it from another point of view. Supposing he had gone about, been to theatres—he had never been to a theatre; petted children; kept dogs; inquired into the personal affairs of his domestics and the clerks at the office. He realised quite suddenly that he had left no provision for his horses—he realised quite suddenly how fond he was of his horses—and back came his orderly mind and made a note that was to the effect that after his death his horses must have a leisured and comfortable life. They had been good friends to him, taking him up to the city day after day, sleek and glossy and groomed; they had responded to the least touch of the rein, understanding the feel of his hands when he went his lonely rides on Wimbledon Common. Sophy would understand why he left a sum to Farbright, his coachman, for his upkeep and the upkeep of his horses. He made aloud that clicking sound with his tongue which horses seem to understand, and the sound wakened him from his dream and he got up

from the bank and walked slowly out of the valley to await the returning coach. Certainly it was the first day of Mr. Frogmore's enchantment.

IV

When Mr. Frogmore had returned to his inn and was sitting in his room, he felt bewildered. He was aware of having heard that some people believed in such things as being cast under a spell; in fact, for one brief moment he seriously thought of looking up "fairy" in the dictionary, but that he put aside as ridiculous; then he wondered if he ought to see a doctor and realised that the idea was preposterous. But one thing he knew, and knew for certain, that a very real sense of peace and comfort had come over him in that valley, and that he felt still a sense of uplift, and he did not know whether it awed him or delighted him, so he determined to go there the next day to see if he should experience the same sensation.

CHAPTER III

COMPLETES ENCHANTMENT OF MR. FROGMORE

I

THE great amazing adventure happened upon the following day. Mr. Frogmore walked a hundred yards or so down the Happy Valley and found a grassy knoll under some dwarf oak trees just near to a place where a spring, delighted with life, had burst its earthly bonds and trickled—I had almost written tickled—its way through moss-covered stones.

Sophy came to him. Not in the frail loveliness of a wraith, or the pale dreariness of a phantom, but, as in life, near to him, almost in the flesh to him, so keen, so refreshed was his memory of her.

She was ridiculously sweet, tender, but not shy. She seemed to have been blown there

as softly as thistledown. She had the most absurd parasol, a thing that would not have shaded a mouse, white satin with moss roses and forget-me-nots embroidered on it, and with an ivory stick to it which a child, handling it carelessly, would snap.

She seemed to fold and unfold like a butterfly sunning itself, displaying one beauty after another, and she looked at him and said "Stephen" with just that note in her voice which made his throat contract and gave him that feeling, peculiar to a man, that he wished he was a woman for the second and could cry, like Homer's heroes, unashamed:

"You have come back to me, Stephen, after all these years."

With his hands digging into the turf, he whispered: "Yes," fearing that by the spoken word the vision would go and leave him all alone, all alone.

It seemed so human, therefore so pitiful, that she pulled off an absurd green silk glove and gave her bare hand into his.

"If this is not real I shall die now," he said.

"Dear Stephen, I am in your heart, and that is real," she answered.

"Memory."

"Dear Stephen, I have been waiting, oh, so long. Now let me tell you things. Do not let your garden, my garden, be too hard, don't let it be too full of rules, dear Stephen. Don't bother if children romp a little, or if some vulgar person picks a rose. I love your thought for me, I do indeed."

"Stop," he cried. "Sophy, I've not been quite true to you. I've been a hard man, hard to other men, but I have not spoken to any young woman, except in the matter of servants, all these years. Let me speak. Do you forgive me, Sophy?"

It was himself who spoke, though he did not know it. It was himself making apology to the dead. It was himself who gave the questions and the answers long years he had wanted to ask and to hear the answers back.

"I want to ask you, if I may," he said, "why I am allowed to have you by me in this way. Tell me, if you may, if I am dead

and this is heaven, as indeed it is to me."

"Not heaven, dear Stephen," she replied, "but the Happy Valley. You see me now because your heart has melted, and it gives you images to love."

"It is many years since I have thought of love," he said sadly. "I crushed down all such feelings when I lost you."

"There is a lot you can do now, dear Stephen."

"I will make what reparation I can," he answered. "Sophy, you won't leave me now, will you?"

"I shall always be in your heart, dear Stephen."

"I loved you when I first saw you," he said. "You were in your little sitting-room, dressed in some soft lilac-coloured dress, and you were making a coloured wool mat; I can see it now."

She seemed to laugh happily as she said: "How well you remember, dear Stephen."

"Let me see now, there was a fire burning and a fire-screen with birds on it and a beadwork fringe."

She nodded at that.

"Then there was a canary in a kind of golden wire palace. And there was 'The Keepsake,' and *Peter Parley's Annual,* yes, and Mrs. Heman's volume of verses on the table, and a chessboard—dear me, how long ago it seems—with red and white chessmen, and you had painted Swiss landscapes on the dark squares—you see I remember everything."

"Yes," she said gaily, "but you have forgotten the curtains. I was very proud of the curtains."

"Oh, no, I haven't," said Mr. Frogmore. "They were of some Indian stuff with lots of little pieces of looking-glass sewn into them. I'm right, am I not?"

"Wonderful," said Sophy, clapping her hands. "But the whatnot, what of that?"

"I had forgotten that, but I can see it now with shells and coral on it, and Chinese ivory things; oh yes, and a full-rigged ship under a glass case on the top shelf."

"You frightened me a little, dear Stephen,

you were so tall and severe looking, and your hair was very black and shining."

"White now, white now," he said, and buried his face in his hands. When he looked up she had gone and he understood, and he was greatly comforted, though he felt very old.

II

Mr. Frogmore's first act the next day was to search out a solicitor in the town, and to inquire of this Mr. Bargell if the Tollgate House and the valley behind it were for sale. It transpired that the owner of the property was recently dead and that all his lands were for sale, and that no doubt the valley might be made a parcel in the lots, and might be bought by private treaty. It might take a week or so as—Mr. Bargell shrugged his shoulders, thereby inferring that the law required that nothing should be done in a hurry so that its fees might have ample time to grow.

Mr. Frogmore began to expand, to feel

years younger, but the good people at his inn said one to the other: "That London gentleman has changed—he looks different and older."

III

Day after day the coach toiled up the steep hill from Amblemouth, stopped to water horses at Lytton Regis, went on by Rockpool, and set down Mr. Frogmore at Stoke Toute Saint, where the returning coach picked him up in the evening.

One day Sophy did not come until quite late, but his two old aunts came, those who had always given him sherry or cowslip wine and cake when he religiously called on them, and they sat down demurely on the grass, and the ghostly bark of their horrid little dog, Scamp, came to his ears. His mind flew back to the volume of dried ferns, and pressed seaweed, to the swearing grey parrot, to the Sally Lunns for tea, to their mosaic brooches, flowers on a black ground, to the carriage they used and always called an "ekiparge."

They faded away when Sophy came.

"A ball dress, Sophy!" he said, wonderingly. He was seated in his favourite spot under the dwarf oaks, from which he could see up the valley to the soft coloured woods and down to the sea which made sometimes a pencil line of blue, sometimes of silver.

"Yes, dear Stephen," she answered, showing him her white silk mittened hands, turning so that he might see the moss rose in her hair. "I am wearing all the dresses you remember to please you. They do, don't they, dear Stephen?"

They talked of those far-off happy days, all too short; of that very ball when she had worn that dress, when chaperons sat on route seats against the wall and the quadrille was all the rage; when powdered flunkeys called aloud: "Lady Cornelia Flashwood's carriage blocks the way," when port wine negus was served at ten o'clock, and much dexterity was exercised by young ladies in the management of their crinolines when they sat down.

IV

Mr. Frogmore, to the accompaniment of a bottle of port, much sealing-wax and seals, and much close writing on sheepskin, became possessed of the Tollgate House, the Happy Valley, etc., etc., extending into seeming volumes of hereinafters, and the aforesaid, and other words beloved of the law. In spirit he was possessed of it already.

He journeyed to London, sent for his man of business, and in a codicil to his will made over the property, together with a sufficient sum to yield six hundred pounds a year, to Henry Belton, his pen and thoughts guided by Sophy Curlet.

CHAPTER IV

HENRY AND ROSE

I

ENRY'S father and mother, blacksmith and dairy-maid, had both been dead nearly seven years. Philip Belton, the blacksmith, had been in his day a remarkable man, one of those men to whom learning is a passion. The Bible and Bunyan he knew by heart, together with several books of Smollett, Richardson's "Clarissa," "Tristram Shandy" and one or two books of travel. The vicar of his parish had lent him books from time to time, but the Bible and Bunyan were his stand-by. On this literary meat was Henry fed, and in course of time himself became a great reader, though with nothing of his father's deeply serious mind. He inherited, in fact, the

cheery humorous imagination of his mother, who drew all her source of literature from old Devon stories, since she had never been taught to read or write. Like many country women she kept her accounts, by notching a tally.

When Henry had first come to London as a boy, after his father had secured him his place with Mr. Frogmore he had lodged in a cottage in Shepherd's Bush with a dairyman and his wife, who were from Kingsbridge in Devonshire, and distant connections of Jane Belton, his mother. They were cheerful folk, who took to Henry from the start, and fed him up with fresh butter and eggs and bacon of their own curing, and took him round the farm, where they were employed, on Sundays. The farm lay just by what is to-day Hammersmith Broadway.

Every morning Henry walked to the city, and walked back every evening, and every morning and evening he took his pint of good ale at "The Red Cow," or "The Hand and Flower," and in the middle of the day, after he became head clerk, he took his

dinner at "The George and Vulture" in a little back room with other head clerks, where they had a good roast, a sweet and cheese and a pint of ale for one shilling and twopence. Here also they sometimes had Friendly Leads at which, through clouds of smoke, various of these gentlemen became vocal, and obliged with "Hot Codlin," or "The Barley Mow," or "The Old Grey Mare," or "Barbara Allen," and on one occasion one of the gentlemen produced a rabbit from Henry's hat to the astonishment of everybody present, including the rabbit, who was quite unaccustomed to these unusual surroundings.

The dairy-man and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Paschen, realised when these convivial gatherings were to take place by Henry's request that Mrs. Paschen would wrap up in a piece of newspaper, an alarming waistcoat of Gordon tartan and a bottle of pomade.

One evening, after one of these events, Henry heard a cry of distress by the turning into Kensington Square, and turning quickly

in the direction of the sound, almost ran into the arms of a man who was running towards him, followed by a young woman in a dressing-gown. He instantly knocked the man down, and heard a breathless voice say: "The spoons," whereupon he gathered that he had made the acquaintance simultaneously of a burglar and a beauty. As he was gathering this knowledge another figure appeared, this time an old lady, also in a dressing-gown, with a poker in her hand, all three people very unusual objects in Kensington at midnight. He pulled the man to his feet, took up a sack that was lying in the road, held the man firmly at the time, and turned to the ladies.

"Search his pockets and let the fool go," said the old lady in a very strict voice.

The man, who was dazed by the blow, and who was a very poor creature, allowed himself to be searched, and yielded a small museum of snuff-boxes, trinkets and other ornaments.

He was then released by the old lady's order, who, in the same sharp tones, bade

Henry return with the proceeds of the robbery to the house.

Servants in various stages of hurriedly put on garments stood by the open door, and within a few minutes, and all as if in a dream, Henry found himself in the drawing-room where a lamp was lighted, in the presence of Lady Angelina Towerton, and Rose Walters.

"You are a pleasant looking young person," said Lady Angelina abruptly, "and you have done me a great service."

"The pleasure is mine," said Henry politely. He was feeling very shy in the presence of this majestic old lady in her red flannel dressing-gown, but still more so by the obvious shyness of the beauty with her hair in two long plaits, her eyes modestly cast down.

"And who are you, may I ask?" said the old lady.

"My name is Belton," he replied. "I am head clerk to a firm of wood pulp merchants in the city."

"An excellent occupation, Mr. Belton. In return for your frankness let me say that my

name is Lady Angelina Towerton, this is Miss Walters, my companion. Rose, kindly ring the bell—Mr. Belton will take some refreshments."

Henry rose to protest, but the old lady insisted. "I am not conventional, Mr. Belton, as you perceive. I take most conventions to be utter nonsense, don't I, child?" This to Rose. "And," she continued, "I take it you are not such a fool as not to know that ladies when they retire put on nightgowns and deal with their hair in a suitable manner. Rose, my dear, kindly see if that silly flock of servants have sufficiently recovered to produce port wine and brandy."

Henry opened the door and Rose, pink with confusion, her eyes never meeting his, slipped out of the room.

"The child," said the imperturbable old lady, "heard that rogue first and raised the alarm. I should have beaten him with this," Henry was suddenly conscious that she still held the poker, "but that I do not walk as quickly as I used to. You will dine here to-morrow at six o'clock, I hope."

Henry quickly glanced at his clothes, and the action was noticed at once by Lady Angelina's sharp eyes.

"Come as you are," she said. "I can't bear the sight of the modern young man with wasp waists and the manners of dancing masters, and as for the girls, huh! they are a lot of simpering idiots. Now that child there is different, country, open air, and the manners of a lady, though her father was a solicitor. I come of a good, hard-swearing sailor stock myself. You will have heard of Admiral Towerton, no doubt?"

Henry, whose acquaintance with Admirals was so limited as not to exist, said in as true tones as he could use, "Who has not heard of Admiral Towerton?"

"I like a man who lies well," said Lady Angelina. "What has become of that child?"

At this moment Rose entered, carrying a tray on which were decanters, glasses, and a cake. Henry at once saw that she had put her hair up and had dressed herself, also that her air of reserve had gone.

He hurried to relieve her of the tray, and her eyes met his for the first time, grey, luminous eyes with long lashes.

"From the west country?" she asked.

"Devon born," he answered.

"I knew it," she said, smiling. "I'm from Plymouth."

"Give me some brandy, child," said Lady Angelina. "Mr. Belton dines here to-morrow. We will have a roast from the bakers. Mr. Belton, my father, who was the only genuine three-bottle man I have ever known, excepting one, thought this an excellent port. Choose for yourself. Brandy for heroes. I was brought up as a boy, Mr. Belton. My father could never abide women, and when I arrived it was a grave disappointment, so I was christened John Henry James Angelina, and called Jack until he died. The Angelina was merely a concession to my mother. She died when I was four years of age and is doubtless in heaven. I find in you an intelligent listener. We shall get on. Rose knows all the anecdotes I can

tell in the presence of young women. Until to-morrow."

She gave him her hand which he had the courage to kiss, to the old lady's great satisfaction, and Rose showed him out in the most demure fashion, saying as they parted: "We shall be very pleased to see you again."

His walk home was made magic with the memory of her beauty.

II

Lady Angelina always called herself "a hard, bitten old dragon," but if all dragons had been like her there would have been no St. George.

"I'm a hard, bitten old dragon, my dear," she said to Rose after the dinner. "And I hate your Montmorencies and namby-pamby people, but this young man is a good, fine, simple creature, with the pleasant manners of a shy schoolboy. I shall entertain him every week if he'll come and see a horrid old frump like me."

"I like him," said Rose.

"Of course you do, like a sensible girl, and I shouldn't be surprised if something came of it."

"Oh, Lady Angelina."

"The privilege of age is that you can speak your mind. I want to see you settled before I die because all my money goes back to the family, and my pension dies with me, so all you will get is a handful of savings and some perfectly preposterous jewellery you can sell. The size of the things would make a cart-horse blush. So there!"

"I don't know why you are so good to me," said Rose. "I don't deserve it."

"My dear, you are sweetly pretty, you don't mind the truth, and you never fidget," said the old lady, patting Rose's hair.

So it came about that Rose heard all about Mr. Frogmore which interested her, and all about wood pulp which bored her, and all about Henry himself which entranced her. In return he heard her very simple story, the story which is so ordinary to the world and so poignant to the people in it. Rose's

mother died giving birth to her, and her father, from being a keen, alert young man with a good country business, became morose, careless in his dress, lost many clients, and finally practically ordered his only child out of the house because she reminded him so much of her mother. Friends of hers had found her this place, where she had been ever since, seven years, and she was now twenty-five.

The old lady who dozed after dinner, and always said she never did such a thing, found in her old age the company of these two young people very pleasant, and one evening when she woke up quietly and saw him holding Rose's hand, and heard him whispering into Rose's ear, she obligingly went to sleep again and never said a word about it.

It was during those pleasant evenings that they began to talk about their childhood, Rose of the stories her old nurse had told her, stories about insects and birds and fairies who raced the birds along deep cut Devon lanes; and Henry of his mother's

stories much the same, of pixie-led people, of people who mysteriously vanished, of the press gang.

One evening Lady Angelina asked them what they talked of while she was, as she said, "composing her mind," and they told her that they talked of what they did when they were children.

"Children! Lord love us and save us, children! What are you now?" she exclaimed. "Now when I was a girl we had old Boney to frighten us, and dear Lord Nelson to trust to, and the Iron Duke, bless him. My dears, I can see myself at my first ball, and a very fine affair it was too, compared with the rubbishy things of to-day. I fell in love with a Major, and to save the situation he introduced me to his wife, a hideous woman, I thought, in a turban, and ridiculously small feet. However, there it was. Then there was nearly an episode with a hairdresser who used to come to our house to prepare our hair for parties. What eyes!"

"You must have been very pretty," said Henry tactfully.

"Pretty, my dear! as ugly as sin, but I had the *je ne sais quoi.* And I had a figure, a little high in the bust, you mustn't mind me, but it was fashionable. I remember my first husband, the Captain, saying: 'As pretty a built craft as ever I clapped eyes on.' I always married sailors, only three, my dears, because they had such short leaves, and long voyages, and one's home was peaceful and comfortable. I like a man about the house, but only now and again, and that if they don't drink. Albert, my second, did drink, but always like a gentleman, and he had the grace never to apologise. But never in his ship where he was as sober as a judge is supposed to be, though some I have entertained gave quite another impression. There, how I do ramble on!"

"It is so interesting to us," said Rose.

"It is an interesting world, my dear," said the old lady. "And how right David was when he said all men were liars, except that he didn't include women, too."

"Would you tell us, please, about the Admiral?" Henry asked.

"Very dashing, my dear, a little whiskery, but very dashing. He was profane, I regret to say, upon occasion, and no lady could have passed the dining-room door after ten o'clock, that is to say, no lady whose hearing was unimpaired, without gaining some slight knowledge of the coarser side of humanity; that was when he was entertaining his friends from sea. They used, on those occasions, enough rum and hot water to float a man-of-war, but slept quite politely to music afterwards. I do not know what the world is coming to now, my dears, for I saw a gentleman, or my eyes betray me, taking water to his dinner a week ago; for ablutions water has its natural gifts, but for interior use, no. Child, give me my vinaigrette."

III

One evening Lady Angelina sent Rose out of the dining-room on a wild-goose chase for an article of jewellery which did not exist, and said kindly to Henry: "Come here and give an old woman a kiss. That's right. I

love you both, my dear. Be very faithful and loving to her, and always remember that gentlemen are to be found in every rank in life."

"But——" Henry began nervously.

"To come down to brass tacks," she replied, "as my last husband used to say, you are in love and so is she. I'm not a fossil, though I may be old, anyhow, my heart is as young as ever it was. Eyes! You wouldn't deceive a pieman. It is the world's business to encourage young people to fall in love and have babies, just as much as it is its business to see that spring follows winter. But perhaps you have spoken to her?"

"Lady Angelina," said Henry, "I love her with all my heart, but at the moment I can't afford to marry."

"Fiddlesticks!" said the old lady. "You are both young. And mind you, I don't want to lose her, but I don't want to tie a girl to an old woman's apron-strings, and I don't believe in long engagements, if I knew you better I'd tell you why."

"I owe a duty to my employer, Lady

Angelina. I have been with the firm for twenty years, and Mr. Frogmore has only just told me that he cannot live very long, and it is my duty to help him as best I can. I have not, in so many words, proposed to Rose, but I think we both know our feelings."

"Well, well, well," the old lady exclaimed. "I know I am a horrid old dragon, but if I were a man—well, there, I suppose I'm accustomed to sailors. I was kissed by fourteen officers one night at Portsmouth, or was it Chatham, under the mistletoe, and every one of them proposed to me for the honour of the ship, even the midshipmen, bless 'em. I don't understand you modern people. Why, Lucy Pinkerton's father, the Admiral, came into the sewing-room one day, so she told me, and said, 'Which of these young men are you going to marry?' She was a beauty, and she was so taken aback that she said: 'Arthur Gordon,' in a hurry, and the Admiral said: 'That's lucky because, I've just said to him, "Sail in, my lad." He's in my study; go and make him happy.' "

"And was she happy?" said Henry, smiling.

"Perfectly miserable, my dear, because she was in love with Lord George Cannister, but it all came right because she ran away with him later on, and they lived in Italy and had nine children and five thousand pounds a year. Now here is Rose."

"I am so sorry," said Rose, coming in at that moment, "but I cannot find the brooch with the Bay of Naples on it. It is very foolish of me."

"Never you mind," said Lady Angelina. "I'll find it myself." And with what was perilously like a wink at Henry the old lady departed.

IV

Rose stood by the door with her pretty head bent down before the look in Henry's eyes.

"Rose," he whispered. "Rose."

Slowly she lifted her head until her eyes met his. She seemed to stumble towards him, and with a cry of rapture on his lips he

stepped forward and held her in his arms. It was quiet, so quiet, as he told her of his love, that the old, prim room seemed hushed and listening. That room had heard other declarations. It was a dead, ornate thing, and yet, when they looked round, hand in hand, it was a room in Paradise. Often, often in after years they spoke of it, often they wondered how the miracle had come to pass; they saw again the wax flowers under glass cases, the gilded clock guarded, for no reason, by a Sphinx; saw the glitter of the candlestick lustres, saw the wool-work hearthrug and the fire stools, and talking, held hands again, and some of that delicious thrill went through them, the divine fire of perfect understanding.

When Lady Angelina came in half an hour later she kissed them both, and two tears rolled down her old rouged cheeks, and then she said in her strong voice: "You dears, oh, damn, I wish that I were young again."

CHAPTER V

MR. FROGMORE'S VOYAGE ENDS

I

AS usual a bowl of roses stood on the desk in Mr. Frogmore's study. Mr. Frogmore himself sat there in his chair by the fire with a bundle of letters, yellow with age, on his knee.

Mr. Frogmore smiled tenderly as he touched the letters, there was no need to read them for he knew them all by heart.

Whereas Mr. Frogmore had in the past dominated the room, he seemed so frail now that the rich austerity of the room dominated him. The kitchen cat, to the amazement of the servants, had taken up his abode by the study fireside, and had been actually encouraged to do so. It sat there now in absolute content, gazing at the fire with sleepy eyes.

A calm, a knowledge of his approaching end, had given Mr. Frogmore's features a gentleness they had never before possessed. Only the ticking of the clock and the occasional shifting of the fire broke the silence.

His mind was back in the old days, wandering peacefully over scenes clearly remembered.

By his side was a decanter of brandy, some water, and a lemon, and as he cut a piece of lemon peel and dropped it in the tumbler the clock chimed eleven.

The mourning rings on his hands glittered in the firelight, and as he looked at them he began to think of his dead friends. Arbuckle; yes, that was Arbuckle, he had never really cared for Arbuckle, yet he had carried his memory about with him all these—what, twenty years? And that one, the moss agate, was old Mrs. Helfington from whom he had inherited money, a pleasant, rosy-faced old lady who wore white cork-screw curls on either side of her face, and used an ear-trumpet and an ebony stick.

Pictures of the past, how very distant yet

distinct they seemed. He saw himself sitting at a table covered with a green baize cloth, with half a dozen middle-aged gentlemen in white chokers and all very much whiskered, discussing the new means of transport by road.

Suddenly Sophy seemed to be near him in the spirit, holding out her hand to him, and at that moment the cat arched its back and its hair stood on end. Mr. Frogmore had dropped back in his chair with a long-drawn sigh. One of the roses in the bowl fell and scattered fragrant petals over the desk. And so they found Mr. Frogmore in the morning.

II

All things were duly observed in the ghastly manner of those days. There were the mutes at the door with the long crepe scarfs round their hats. There were the black horses with nodding black ostrich plumes: and there was the fussy undertaker going about his grim business and mentally adding a pound or two on to his bill

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when he noted the richness of the house. Henry was there as chief mourner, and the doctor, and the solicitor, and a few city people, and the usual curious strangers.

After the ceremony Henry was requested to return to the house by the solicitor, and there, in company with several strangers, a solemn but tremendous repast was served by Soames, the old butler, after which Mr. Follit read the will.

No one was forgotten who had served Mr. Frogmore, not even the office boy. The terms of the Sophy Curlet bequest were read out. Henry sat dumbfounded at the announcement of his fortune, six hundred pounds a year, a house and a valley, a valley with such a curious name, and a further two hundred pounds a year as one of the trustees of the Sophy Curlet Horticultural College. He was a rich man, he could marry Rose!

The firm of Frogmore, Jallut & Wishcorn would forever cease to be. It was to be put upon the market with all stock, contracts, etc., etc., with the proviso that all employees of the firm were to be taken on for two

years, and it appeared that three of the strange gentlemen present were practically the owners.

This said and done, everybody went again into the dining-room where Mr. Frogmore's best port, sherry, and Madeira were set out in his fine decanters, together with sandwiches and biscuits, and Mr. Follit raised his glass to the memory of Mr. Frogmore, and all the other gentlemen raised their glasses and were still solemnly so doing an hour afterwards when Henry managed to get away.

III

Bob Prettyjohn was one of Henry's few friends who was not a clerk in the city. He was a cheerful, rotund man of forty, rather like a bullfinch in appearance, which was always added to by the fact that he was continually whistling.

It was a joke against Bob that he never willingly sold a book out of the small second-hand shop he kept in the Charing Cross

Road, and it was true. He had an income of two hundred a year, and, being a bachelor, was in those days quite comfortably off. He used the shop as a sitting-room, slept in the back room, and let the upper part to a Mrs. Jukes, who sub-let the top story to an old actor who called himself Rupert Greatacres, "a fine sonorous sounding patronymic," he would explain, "a name which flows trippingly on the tongue. Those who had the misfortune to be called Smith cannot remain Smith in our profession. Mr. Smith will make his appearance in Hamlet! No. Mr. Rupert Greatacres for one night only will assume the role of the Moody Dane! Yes."

It was Bob Prettyjohn's delight to draw the old actor out, to hear him roll his r's, to listen to stories, mostly invented, of his triumphs: and on the very afternoon, about half-past five, of Mr. Frogmore's funeral, he was seated in the shop telling of his enormous success in a play called "Property" when Henry entered.

"Thrice welcome, youth of Devon," said

Mr. Greatacres. "A murrain on all who fail to see great tidings on your face."

"Something has happened to Harry," said Bob.

"Is the Imp here?" Henry asked. The Imp being a melancholy boy who dusted the books and warned off customers.

"He is just about to go," said Bob. "Do you want him? James!"

James got down from his broken-backed chair by the door from which he sadly observed the passers-by. He was a stray street urchin saved by Bob from a career of petty crime. He walked round the bookcase which hid the back of the shop and waited.

"James," said Henry, "go to the 'Bear' and return with a bottle of brandy. Here is the money."

Bob gave a loud whistle, Mr. Greatacres threw out his chest, and the Imp murmured "Brandy," and looked at the sovereign in his hand, sighed and departed.

"Brandy!" said Bob. "This must be a great occasion. I'll get the glasses."

"Stands Devon where she did?" said Mr. Greatacres, "or did my ears deceive me?"

From his pocket Henry produced an obvious jeweller's box, and the two men stared when he pressed the spring and opened it, for there in a bed of cream-coloured velvet lay a garnet ring.

"Harry, my dear fellow," cried Bob, taking both his hands. "Engaged at last!"

"Soon to be wedded," said Henry, blushing, and feeling warmly the affection of his friends.

"Think of this emblem of connubial bliss," said Mr. Greatacres. "This glittering jewel on a lily hand; youth wed to youth and all the world a song."

"There is more to tell," said Henry.

"What are equators to the loving heart," said Mr. Greatacres tremendously. "When roseate Cupid make his girdle round the world! What lifts all Nature higher than the frozen glories of the Alps?"

"Brandy," said the Imp, coming in unheard. "And the change."

"Here's a florin, for yourself," said Henry.

"A florin," said the Imp, looking sadly at the coin. "Food." And so saying vanished.

"I have had no time in which to tell you," said Henry as Mr. Greatacres was opening the bottle. "Mr. Frogmore is dead."

"The way of all flesh. All flesh is grass," said Mr. Greatacres, drawing out the cork with a loud pop.

"And he has left me eight hundred pounds a year."

"Then you are a millionaire!" cried Bob.

"I feel like one," Henry acknowledged. "But it is true. Eight hundred pounds a year, and a house and land. I own land, Bob, I, who have been working on for years with no prospects that I could see, saving to get married when I could. Isn't it wonderful?"

"I'm so delighted," said Bob, "I don't know what to say."

"You'll stay with us, of course, and Mr. Greatacres."

Mr. Greatacres, mellowed by his third glass of brandy, and resting his hands upon

the table to give the air of a Member of Parliament about to sit for his portrait, replied: "My dear young friend, the sight of you in wedded bliss would move me to tears. I once, a multitude of years agone, had a passion for one so fair, so gentle, that a gazelle would have been a tiger to her, but she wed another. Cash, sir, was the cause of it, cash and a cad. He was playing leads when I was playing heavies. Though only twenty, sir, I played kings, family advisers and the like. The *Norwich News* was good enough to say: 'Mr. Greatacres has promise,' but she preferred mammon to art, and though of such tender years, I wrote upon the tablets of my mind 'Bachelor.' Forgive the tear."

"Come, Mr. Greatacres, there must have been others," said Henry.

"Passing, passing as zephyrs. But still I raise my glass," and he again helped himself—"to the unknown beauty, the future Mrs. Belton."

With the air of a bishop solemnly conveying a benediction he raised his glass high

and with the others drank "Long life and happiness." And it was meant in real affection, and as such Henry took it, though it was known to Bob and himself that Mr. Greatacres had lived a miserable married life with a lady who drank all his small fortune away.

IV

From Charing Cross Road to Kensington Square Henry walked with such an expression on his face that gave the world his secret. Women looked at him and sighed, and men looked at him, some with envy, some with scorn. A score of times he was nearly run over, a score of times it was only the skill of other pedestrians which prevented them from being run down, and when on hearing at the house that Lady Angelina and Rose were out he came to earth with a sickening sense of the incongruity of things, he could have wept.

Nothing ought to have happened so contrary on a day like this; the ring seemed in-

adequate, the sky black, fate against him. Perhaps after all something would be found in the will of the late Mr. Frogmore which would show that it was out of order and the fortune did not exist.

Then he remembered he had not had any dinner, and thinking to relieve his mind by food and drink, he walked across the High Street to "The Civet Cat" and there ordered a chop, potatoes, and a pint of beer.

He happened upon an empty coffee-room and a hovering waiter, one of those waiters who suggest things and always take "No thank you" for the opening of a conversation, as if conversation were a form of chess.

"I think a drop of mushroom ketchup would go well," said the waiter, fingering the cruet.

"No, thank you."

"Some says mushroom ketchup, and some says 'give me Worcester sauce,' now I say a slice or two of fried onion goes well."

"No, thank you," said Henry.

"Perhaps you are right, sir. You'll know Mr. Brightlingsea, perhaps?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, perhaps you're right. He was a nice gentleman, had a nice funeral too, never seen so many people cry, relations and all. He'd lost his foot owing to short sight; you know, sir, like as if you'd 'ad a drop too much and forgot the steps. In the blood I suppose. Thirty wreaths. Nice bit of cheese, sir?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, perhaps you're right, sir, some say a radish, I say a bit of nice celery. Celery, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

"Curious thing, love, sir," said the waiter, putting radishes on the table, there being no celery. "Miss Ringler down at the post office, killed, sir. They brought in 'Wilful' but I never thought so. Now with an old man like Mr. Totteridge, he's got to die sometime and they did him in proper, but with the young girl, I say no: not even with jealousy. Strangled she was, red hair, they do say red hair leads to temper, some do, I say black. A nice glass of brandy?"

"No, thank you."

"Perhaps you're right, sir, some say brandy, I say London gin. It's got a bite, that's what I say. I have a friend what drives a cab, sir, and he says 'Rum,' that's what he says. He says, 'Give me rum hot, and I'll see the rest of the muck elsewhere.' Common but true. Cabmen, very queer characters, sir, one of them killed an old lady in 'Ampstead last week, so one of my gentlemen was saying only to-night. 'Orrible story, sir, one of the other gentlemen let his chop go quite cold. Anything else, sir?"

"No, thank you."

"That will be chop, tenpence, chips a penny, ale fourpence, one and three, bread and butter a penny, one and four, things do tot up, sir."

Henry gave him one and sixpence and walked out into the evening air, scarcely aware of his own existence, except as one terrible ache.

Once more he stood outside the door and looked at the dark windows, whispering, "Rose, Rose, and it was to have been such a

day." Just as he was turning to go away his heart leaped to see a light in the drawing-room window. In a moment he was at the door pealing the bell.

"The ladies have just returned, sir," said the trim maid.

He was shown into the drawing-room, there was Rose in a white evening-dress, and Lady Angelina in purple and black.

"Rose, Lady Angelina," he cried. "I'm a rich man."

"You'll need to be from the way you rang the bell," said Lady Angelina.

"I have eight hundred a year, a house, and a valley."

"Henry!" said Rose.

"A valley!" said Lady Angelina. "What do you want with a man to dress you?"

"No, no," he said, exultant, "a real valley, the Happy Valley, trees, and a river, and glens. Isn't it wonderful?"

"For real lunatics commend me to lovers," said Lady Angelina. "Come, my dear, what is it all about? We have come from the most dreadful party, where everybody was deaf

and the saddle of mutton was burnt. Any one of my husbands would have flayed me alive if I'd dared to give such a dinner. Now, young man, out with it."

"Mr. Frogmore."

"What! the ogre?" said Rose.

"The fairy godfather," said Henry, and with that he told them the whole story.

"Well, of all the unexpected, fantastical affairs, I never did hear the like," said Lady Angelina. "Was the man mad or repentant, I wonder. Anyhow, there you are, my dears, and I suppose you will dash off and get married at once, and leave this horrid old dragon to fend for herself. No," she said, as Rose went over to her, "don't you think I shall, or ever should, keep true lovers apart, though I shall be a perfect nuisance popping up at all sorts of seasons and demanding a bed to sleep in. You must do some work, young man, not walk about scaring birds in loud check suits and generally behaving as if the earth belonged to you. Henry, my dear, Rose, dear child, I am very, very glad for both of you." And murmuring some-

thing about "damned old fool," she began to cry.

Henry put his arm round her, and Rose knelt by her side, comforting her as best they could.

"There, there," she said, drawing them close to her. "If somebody doesn't give me a stiff glass of brandy and water I shall go on for ever."

When Henry returned from the dining-room with the brandy and water he found the old lady quite dry-eyed in Rose's arms, and a look almost of fear on Rose's face as she said to him: "Henry, Lady Angelina must live with us, please, and be like our mother."

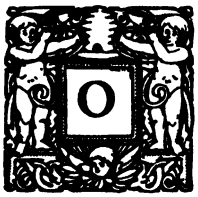
He grasped the situation at once, and looking very absurd with the glass of brandy and water in one hand, and a solemn look on his boyish face, he said: "If you please, mother, will you adopt us?" The glance Rose gave him, the sudden tender smile on the old lady's lips, the way with which she held out her hand would have repaid any man a thousand times.

She said, as was like her: "I hope there's a comfortable bed," Henry having told them the Tollgate House was furnished. Then they all fell to laughing, and Henry produced the ring, and there was much merriment and joy.

When Lady Angelina lay in bed that night with the curtains drawn close round her she put her thin old hands on her withered old breasts and said aloud: "After all these years a mother. God is very good to hardened old sinners."

CHAPTER VI

THE TOLLGATE HOUSE



NE of the last acts of Mr. Frogmore's life had been very characteristic of him. After he had carefully been over the Tollgate House in the company of a local builder, he decided that it must be furnished, carpets must be put down, the well attended to, and the drainage besides.

It had been unoccupied for several years, but had not been allowed to fall into decay inside, though the gates and garden were, in one case, rotten, and the other untended and wild.

The local builder had, fortunately, good local taste, and the late occupants having kept the old panels intact, three good coats of white paint to every room were suggested and accepted. A jobbing gardener was employed to attend to the matter of seeing

the garden in order, and a woman was found to look after the house until such time as the new owners should come into possession. This last was fortunate, since Martha Slapton had been born and bred in the house, and was delighted to go back after an absence of twenty years; a pleasant bustling woman of forty odd years.

But the characteristic act of Mr. Frogmore's was in saving money from habit. He furnished, except for the beds, from an old curiosity shop instead of going to the more expensive furniture establishment at Plymouth. Thus Fate again assisted Rose and Henry, for the dealer unloaded all his unsaleable Chippendale and Queen Anne furniture on Mr. Frogmore, so that quite unconsciously they presented Rose and Henry with jewels really worthy of the casket. In consideration of his very good bargain, the dealer threw in some beautiful pieces of Staffordshire pottery, real cottage stuff he thought it, and, at Mr. Frogmore's instigation, a walnut grandfather clock with a silver face.

The Tollgate House was of an irregular shape, having twice been added on to. It had four windows in the living-room, each looking a different way, up the road, down the road, straight into the road, which here took a right-angle bend on the hill, and one window overlooking the valley from which one could see not only the valley but the long lane into the village of Bartlet's Cross at the far end.

The old smithy stood alone to the right of the porch, the kitchen and servants' room, both additions were at the back, and the best bedroom was over the kitchen with one window overlooking the sea, and one over the valley.

It was on a late July evening that Rose and Henry's lumbering carriage stopped at the door, and the driver and Henry hauled in the boxes, while Martha Slapton made herself known, with a low bow, to Rose.

It was like a dream to be there, to the two newly married people, in their very own house, with their very own things, their very own servant.

Regardless of Martha, who was laying their supper, they stood hand in hand in the living-room, looking at their possessions: a beautiful walnut tallboy stood on one side of the fireplace, over which an old mirror framed in maple wood was hung. There were four wheatsheaf Chippendale chairs and one heavier chair with claw and bull feet. In three corners were corner cupboards reaching from floor to ceiling, one of them holding their crockery, another without a door to the upper half, with bookshelves waiting to be filled.

The room was lit by candles in old heavy brass sticks and the candle-light made the night seem through the windows of a deeper blue.

Henry took Rose in his arms, kissed her and said: "Dearest, to think old Frogmore did all this for us!"

Rose pushed him away from her, holding him at arm's length. "Yes," she said, "you are the most wonderful thing in the world. Now I must look at the kitchen."

She opened this door and that, peered into

the cupboards, examined the pewter, looked at herself in the shining copper pans, won the adoration of Martha, who called her "my deeur" in five minutes; ran up the stairs followed by Henry all the time, a wondering Henry, who saw for the first time the house proudness of his wife. They came to their bedroom, and a beautiful new shyness came over her as she said: "Dearest, leave me alone for a moment, please. I want to love this room all by myself." And when he had gone out she sank on her knees by the bed and said, "Please, dear God, make me very good and let me help Henry, and if it is Thy will let me give us children. Amen."

. . . . . .

A small fire burned in the grate because, although it was July, there had been a sea mist in the afternoon and the syren from the Tor Point lighthouse had sent its weird cry out to sailors. Martha, too, had thought it proper to light a fire for a welcome, and it shone now on the polished surfaces of the chairs and the tallboys, and twinkled in the

mirror, and made the shadows of Rose and Henry dance upon the walls.

A duck, and apple tart and cream was Martha's idea of the first banquet, then cheese made at Stokes' Farm and good cider to drink: what better fare?

This was their first day together, their wedding day. Lady Angelina, with the wisdom of her years, had decreed that they should be married in a country church, and Mr. Follit, the lawyer, having displayed an astonishing humanity, had arranged everything, had been down to the house, seen to provisions so well that one wonders if he charged "to one duck, six and eightpence"; had seen the parson, paid the fees, and had indeed sat at the back of the little church reading the name and address of his hatmaker inside his hat a great many times, under the impression that it was some kind of prayer, and finally had escorted Lady Angelina back to her hotel at Exeter.

Bob Prettyjohn, who had been best man, had his evening enlivened by Lady Angelina's vivid and rather racy recollection of

her three wedding days, and an obscure female relation or connection of Rose's who had appeared without warning, but owing to a notice in the *Daily News,* had sat in a kind of fascinated horror at Lady Angelina's conversation.

"Of course you must dine with me," she said to Mr. Follit and the lady who had answered to the name of Billinger, "and we will drink champagne and try not to feel miserable. I'm sure a wedding always does make me feel wretched, just as one always wants to laugh at a funeral. My dear people," she said at dinner, "I shall never forget my first wedding, never, I was too tightly laced and my face was crimson, and when I knelt down my laces burst and I nearly laughed; and twenty-four hours afterwards he was recalled, and had to go to sea, and I felt quite improper. Don't let me shock you, Miss Billinger. I expect you must often have wondered, Mr. Follit, how many times a fish slice goes round, if you know what I mean. I've given fish slices as wedding presents for years out of my stock.

You see if you have been married three times you may be said to collect fish knives, slices, butter dishes, pairs of spoons in handsome cases, and bound volumes of Mr. Tennyson. People could do so much better if they tried in this life. I've often wondered why nobody takes up seeing people off as a profession: you know—'Be sure to let me know if you arrive safely. Don't forget to give my love to Aunt James. I've got you a foot-warmer and a seat facing the engine.' It's all so dull. Miss Billinger, you are not eating. Fill up your glass, Mr. Follit, and give me some, too. I'm a horrid old dragon, but I do love those two children. I hope she will have heaps of babies—now I have shocked you, Miss Billinger. Don't I chatter on?"

"I fear that Rose's father is going down the hill," said Miss Billinger, who had the sour spinster's secret delight in people going down the hill, it made her feel she was so very much going upward.

"Then I hope he will hurry up and get to the bottom," said Angelina decidedly. "I

wrote and told her father that Rose was marrying with my consent, and even Mr. Follit, who, by the way, is keeping the port to himself I notice, was taken aback by the reply."

"A disgraceful letter," said Mr. Follit. "I even dislike recalling the terms of that scurrilous epistle."

"And now, Mr. Follit," said Lady Angelina, "the bottle being still with you, will you propose the toast of our dear ones, and then I think we should drink to the memory of Mr. Frogmore."

Miss Billinger made great demur at having her glass refilled again, as she was already beginning to find the world a more pleasant and benign place than she usually found it. However, Lady Angelina insisted, and the toasts were drunk.

There could have been no finer testimony to the enchantment of Mr. Frogmore than the glasses raised to him that night, not only in Devonshire, but by various people he had benefited.

The dawn over the sea, the first delicate,

pearly light breaking over the valley, the first rosy beams flooding Tollgate House, the birds greeting a new day, all new, all wonderful to Rose and Henry.

The sweet new intimacy and the first beautiful shyness, the bustling of Martha below in the kitchen, all these are intoxicating happiness to the young lovers.

They went down to breakfast, and it all seemed so wonderful. She poured out his tea and handed him his cup, and then, as their fingers touched, her eyes dropped and a deep blush crept into her cheeks. Then she rose from her chair and came over to him, looked him in the eyes, and said again, "Yes, you are the most wonderful person in the world." And just for a second the world stood still.

Martha, who regarded food as the art, music, and literature of the world, entered after having given a wonderful imitation of a gruff old gentleman in the throes of a heavy cold, and brought them to the practical side of life. Her ideas of breakfast must have been gained out of some book,

except that she couldn't read, of elephant-eating giants, for she set before them a dish of eight fried eggs, sleeping their long sleep on a mountain of bacon, and announced that what with those, a brawn, and the cold duck, they might manage until she had time to get some things in.

Dew-spangled roses welcomed them in the garden, and nodding sunflowers, and scented musk, and pinks, and great trumpets of blue and white striped convolvulus, and periwinkles, and soft, velvet-eyed pansies.

"Rose," said Henry, "I have an inspiration; I shall start the forge. I shall go back to my father's work. We will shoe horses and make iron gates. What it will be to be strong, brown, and feel one's strength at the anvil, for work, as Lady Angelina said, must be done. What do you say?"

"I say everything you want to do is right."

"Sweetheart," he said, his arm about her, "now shall we open that gate and go into the Happy Valley?"

And she answered: "I feel as if life were a dream."

As they walked towards the gate, came the sound of Martha's bustling footsteps and then the sound of her soft Devon voice. "You'll be having midday dinner, my deeurs?" But even that didn't break the spell.

CHAPTER VII

THE HAPPY VALLEY

ROM the gate a wandering footpath went down the valley, coming to the stream after meandering for about half a mile. As Rose and Henry stood looking down their valley they could hear behind them the muffled whispering of the sea, and before them a breeze stirring among the branches of the trees. Above these sounds was one almost as old as the hills about them, the sound of a man whetting a scythe.

Down by the water's edge, as they wandered entranced, the willow herb bloomed and the water arrowhead moved delicately agitated by the stream. The warm morning sun brought out the scent of wild thyme when they crushed it as they walked, and dragonflies and butterflies gave, by their

flittings, a sense of miniature gaiety to the scene.

The trees on the far side of the valley grew so closely together that the sun's slanting rays made them both look like velvet brushed the wrong way of the nap.

There was in the valley such a quietude, such a sense of contentment that no words were necessary, no action needed, to point out detail, such harmony, and the comfortable drowsy hum of the insect orchestra held the place that Rose and Henry were filled to their inmost hearts with the beatitude of God, nature, and well-being.

They were country people, and, as country people, quick to see and slow to speak. They were lovers, quick to feel and slow to demonstrate. They were man and woman merged in one being, like a part of Nature, warmed by the sun, at one with all the other creatures warmed by the sun, accepting and embalming themselves with the scents and sounds about them, conscious yet unconscious of the glow of scarlet pimpernels, rapturous yet unknowing of the patterns of shadows;

wholly held by the beauty of the earth.

They sat down at the very place where Mr. Frogmore had sat, a natural resting-place with shade, and a central view of the valley, and it seemed to them that he sat there too, and welcomed them; and it seemed that a gleaming vision of a girlish figure in a pork-pie hat and a billowing skirt was also there.

Henry broke the silence. "Dearest," he said, "I don't suppose I've thought of it for years, but I can see myself as a little boy, and my father, very black with a big curly head, and I can smell the smell of horses' hoofs singeing, and hear the laboured breathing of the bellows in the forge."

"I am feeling like a child, too," said Rose. "And I can smell slate pencils, and hear the —I wonder what to call it—the voice of children outside from the schoolroom on a fine day. And I used to wear mittens and have chilblains, and steal jam."

He drew her to him and their memories became part of Nature's chorus.

CHAPTER VIII

ENTER THE DREAM-CHILDREN

I

UCH may happen in two years, though to some people nothing seems to happen in a lifetime. Lady Angelina was living at Tollgate House. Henry shod horses and made his iron gates, and he and Rose were known for miles around as "terrible pleasant folk." The verdict on Lady Angelina was that she was a character, and as such was to be admired, respected, and feared; she was also very much loved by the cottagers from Bartlet's Cross to Stoke Toute Saint because of her unflinching direct kindness. "Her isn't a lady to beat about the bush, my deeur," said one good woman to Rose. "Her comed in when my boy was thought by all to be on his death-bed. 'Death-bed, nonsense,' her did

say; 'do'e open the winders and get the stench out of the room, woman, and let me tell 'e that soap and water never did a soul harm.' Then she give him some of that frightful red mixture, and there he is so well as me."

The Sophy Curlet Horticultural College had been by now established, and Henry had sat at several directors' meetings, and there had acquitted himself very properly, so well, indeed, that his wife had twice received large bunches of roses from the gardens by coach, which arrived in a fair state of freshness owing to elaborate directions being given to the guard.

Two years had indeed made a difference. There were Henry's own sheep in the valley now, and Rose was fortunate with her cows and chickens. There had been tragedies—there always are in a small farm—Lizzie, Anna, Claud and James had been the most charming of pigs alive, but, what with skim milk and garden stuff, they had to prove sadly how wonderful were their charms after death. Then, by tacit agreement, the

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appearance of a fowl upon the table was received as if that fowl were a complete but accommodating stranger. In the same way ducks were alluded to as having come from far distant lands. These amiable devices were always being upset by Martha, who would proudly announce with a duck or a chicken that it was the one known to the family as Annie or some such title.

"My dears," said Lady Angelina, one day at the three o'clock dinner, "I believe I am being gossiped about with Peter Jolly."

"Oh, mother!" said Rose, laughing.

"There's something in it," said Henry. "That comes of having gay old things about the place. And Peter has had six wives, so that he may be said to be a marrying man."

"At my time of life, too," said the sprightly old lady. "I'm sure I have some attraction for men of the sea. This morning he stopped his cart and gave me three mackerel in a very meaning way. I inquired after his health, and he assured me that he was as strong as a lad, and tired of living alone. Now what do you think of that?"

"Goings on with a fish hawker; fine times we've come to," Henry said, laughing.

"You are a disgrace to the family," said Rose, getting up and kissing the old lady.

"My dears," she said, "I remember Lettice Burnleigh, a most handsome creature, with rather a bold way of doing her hair, ran away with one of those gipsy men called Lee, who sold pots and pans and Turks Head brooms, and was perfectly happy, and had four beautiful children. When I had a little house, years ago, outside Dorchester, they came to stay with me, and I've never seen anything so brown as the lot of them, and the table manners of kings and queens."

"But the county?" asked Rose, amazed.

The old lady chuckled. "My dears, the Bishop called and asked me not to do it, and I asked him if he was a Christian or only a Bishop. You should have seen the man, he held up his hands and said that the county had asked him to speak, and, my dears, I'm rather afraid I replied that as it was his profession, he could tell the county to go to hell."

"Oh, mother, and what happened?" cried Henry.

"The most extraordinary thing, my dears. At that moment the youngest of the babies, a brown, fascinating creature, bundled in and, without a word, climbed on to the Bishop's knee and began to play with the gold cross he wore on a chain, then the little mite looked up into his face and said: 'I like you.' Well, my dears, if the county had seen the Bishop as a bear on my hearthrug a few minutes later, I think it would have known he was a Christian and been horrified. You see, he had no children of his own."

In the silence that followed Lady Angelina suddenly realised how poignant had her last remark been. "My dear dears," she began.

"I want to tell you something, mother," said Rose.

"So do I," Henry said.

"I'm an old fool," said Lady Angelina.

At that moment Martha came in to clear away the dinner.

II

"It is a confession," said Rose, her eyes on the ground, "and I meant to make it some day, but I've always been frightened."

"Speak the truth and shame the devil," said the old lady.

"I am frightened now," said Rose, "in that it will hurt Henry, but I think I'm more frightened in case anybody might laugh. You see, as we——as we haven't had any babies I've invented one."

Henry's hand went out to hers and held it tight.

"She is called Penelope," Rose went on. "And she is so small that she can play with the insects. She lives in the Happy Valley. There!"

"Rose, dearest," said Henry softly, "I understand, because I have one too; he is called Tor, and he lives in an acorn."

"I think you are two deliciously mad children," said Lady Angelina very gently. "And I'll tell you what we will do: we will arrange for Penelope to live with Tor in the

acorn, and the insects and things shall teach them. In the long winter evenings we are just going to have we can tell one another stories about them, and I hope mine will not shock the youthful mind."

The old lady's complete acceptance of the idea, and the fact that, in their great longing for children, both Rose and Henry had invented a dream-child, made the quaint conceit both possible and harmonious, and should it appear out of the way to anybody, let them feel the spell of the Happy Valley and it is a million to one they will invent a dream-child of their own; otherwise they have lost their sprig of moly.

"Penelope is always dressed in blue with a black pinafore," said Rose dreamily. "And she has white stockings and blue shoes, and her hair is brown with real gold in it like autumn sunlight in a hedge, and she is so tiny that she can dance with motes in a beam of light."

"Tor," said Henry, "is dressed in brown and has green shoes, and he sleeps out of doors in the summer on the top thread of a

spider's web so that he can rock. He was once nearly drowned in a raindrop, and has twice been invited to dine with a wild bee of his acquaintance, and they had heather honey, and lime-flower honey, and clover honey, and honeysuckle honey, and they each had a sip of very old dew."

"Life is very strange," Lady Angelina said. "In my young days, when George IV. was king, I remember meeting an old gentleman whose great-grandfather was a personal friend of Charles I.'s, and who always drank Canary Sack until he was a hundred, and died in his bed convinced until the last minute that he would live forever. His last words were: 'The nation is going to the dogs,' but curiously enough it isn't. It doesn't sound very much in the spirit of our talk, but it is, really, because life, and at seventy, is so curious and fantastic that I quite believe in your dream-children, and now, if one of you will give me a hand, I shall go to bed."

CHAPTER IX

WINTER WISE

THE autumn came and spread her glowing fires in the Happy Valley. There flared gold and crimson, tawny, russet, and orange; spits of blue glowed in the fire in the forge when the first frosts came. In the garden laggard chrysanthemums showed belated heads of colour, a rose here and there lingered. The swifts and swallows left for warmer climates. The earth began to slumber; snail trails gleamed brightly; sometimes the skies were like lead; the sea's passionate voice growled more harshly on the beach; people's breath rose like smoke on the chill air; wild honeysuckle, the twisted eglantine, flowered the second time with but a faint glory of its first trumpeting. The evenings drew in.

With eyes remote from cities, Henry and

Rose watched the pageant of the year: that lusty comedian of the hedges, the robin redbreast, raised his resonant song, always (at least to me) herald of pantomime, and crackers, and stockings tied to the bedpost, and cakes, and ale. Dear Shakespeare, greatest of all men who ever held a pen, or smelt a flower, knew how in death a rose lives on in the perfume of memory.

The perfume of memory, carried as now the thistledown is carried on the wings of Time, dwelt on the Tollgate House. Henry had returned from the big garden in the making, had tasted the sweets and bitters of authority; came to his own fireside a big, happy man, and on the first real crisp autumn evening began his dream-child story.

The mist hung about the house with its cold grey breath, but the logs on the fire burned with a pleasant hissing, and tea and hot cakes and an apple with the cold winter bite in it had cheered him, and Lady Angelina's voice cutting into his comfort made him begin.

"About this boy," she said.

"Tor," he said. "Tor, of course, isn't born. He still lives——"

"With Penelope," said Rose.

"Yes: in the acorn."

"We must know all about this acorn," said Lady Angelina. "For instance, which way up is it?"

"It stands on its end," said Henry, "so that the cup makes the roof, and the smoke comes out of the stalk."

"But how is it propped up?" Rose asked.

"The stag beetle, who is the village carpenter, saw to that; he shored it up and also made all the furniture."

"Is there a garden?" said Rose.

"There is everything in miniature," said Henry. "A waterbut, and beehives, and a toolshed. 'As in real life,' said the stag beetle. 'Even down to geraniums in pots on the window-sills.'

"And, of course, the furniture is all curved to suit the acorn. The dresser is curved, and so are the windows and doors. There is a kitchen and scullery, and——"

"Who does the rough work?" Rose inquired.

"Two ladybirds, but your child, Penelope, does the cooking and helps with the beds. They have some very good pictures on the walls, too. There is one of a worm turning, and one of a very good dinner, and a splendid portrait of a silkworm framed in mulberry wood, and one of a paper boat in a storm."

"Penelope makes all her own dresses," said Rose decisively.

"By rule of thumb," said Henry. "Sixteen nails to the yard."

"I'm thankful no really sane person is present," said Lady Angelina. "But then, I'm very doubtful if there is such a thing as a really sane person. Of course there are people who know the size of their boots and gloves and hats, and how many rods, poles, and perches go to a hogshead, but I don't count them. When I was a girl all our stories were moral, or cautionary, and excessively dull, but we believed in fairies under the noses of our nurses, and I, for one, fell in love with an entirely imaginary prince, and

lived a dream-life under, if I remember rightly, one of those red toadstools with white spots, much more seen in illustrations than in real life. Tell me, Henry, the insects had an orchestral society, I think?"

"Oh, certainly," said Henry, as if such conversations were an ordinary event. "The stag beetle puts strings on to himself and plays the violoncello."

"And the gnats?" Rose asked.

"Chorus. The bass by frogs. I wonder if you'll understand," said Henry, looking dreamily at the fire. "Down in the valley where I sometimes go alone and sit quiet listening to the voices of Nature, there does seem to be a story in it all. It was once when I found an acorn by my side that I began this dream-life of Tor, just for a joke, and it has been so jolly building it up, and finding new things to put into it, and I can almost hear the tiny, tiny kettle singing on the hob when Tor comes in for his tea."

"Winter wise," said Lady Angelina. "That's what my old father used to call it. When we were children we gathered

together of winter evenings, and he and my mother told us stories. I had a wonderful life as a child, and it took me forty years to know it." She put down her beadwork and held out a hand to each of them. "Go on with the story of Tor and Penelope, my dears, it isn't anything like as fantastic as life, and you two are dream-children to me. I believe in all the things like guardian angels, and the devil with a tail, and the last trumpet, and really good women, so that nothing you can say will surprise me. Did Tor wear flannel next to his skin?"

"No," said Henry, decidedly. "He wore silk."

"I like him the better for it," said the old lady.

It was in this pleasant fashion they wore out the winter evenings, all aglow with a charming domesticity. It was during these happy times that Lady Angelina invented the story of the celebrated firm of Pothook & Hanger, those wonderful partners who always walked at a slant as if a high wind were blowing; and Rose decided that the

children should be taught to measure by one of those caterpillars who walk like an inverted U, ∩, and always seem to be on the job of measuring the world.

Henry it was who beguiled an evening with the story of the cricket who, returning late one night from his Cricket Club, was amazed to see an army of seven thousand ants with pick-axes and rope and cranes at work in the path because somebody had dropped a grain of rice there.

It seemed, indeed in a way it was, a beautiful folly, but in her wise old head Lady Angelina knew that the security was false, she knew that neither Rose nor Henry were fully awakened; life was too much of a game, and a game in which the players were blind. Dame Nature is no lady, and she plays odd tricks on people very, very often.

One day, in the middle of February, when Henry was in London, there came a rare thing in the West Country, a blizzard. It began at six o'clock in the evening quite unexpectedly. The wind had been blowing all day, but only half a gale, then at six it

developed into a raging, shrieking thing, tearing down the valley and buffeting the house like a thing possessed.

They had made fast for the night, but it seemed as if doors and windows must be burst in, the whole house became full of sighs and groans, of flapping carpets when the wind found a way under doors, and to these was added the voice of the sea, raised fiercely as if in anger.

Hungrily the wind licked round the house as if it sought some weak spot by which it might enter in and wreck everything. Then, at nine, the snow came. The snow came at first in violent spittings down the chimney, lashings against the windows, then with a dreadful deadly calm, the calm of a smothering victory.

The women sat together, not liking to go to bed, listening to the howl of the storm, hearing the moan of the wind, the shriek of the wind, the silences during which it seemed to rest before gathering strength.

"Listen," said Rose. "Listen to that."

"Boom!" A pause, then again, "Boom!"

"God save all men at sea," said Lady Angelina.

"Is there nothing we can do, nothing?" said Rose. Then, with a tearing crash, a tree fell close to the house, and the sound mingled with the now frequent booming of the guns.

They had left the window facing down the road uncurtained in the irresistible impulse to see the whirling snow, and now, at about midnight, when the wind seemed to have dropped a little, they saw the weird sight of lanterns swaying in unseen hands, held by unseen men going in a staggering procession down the road.

"The men," said Martha. "They won't do nothing on a night like this."

"Boom!" went the guns. "Boom!"

"It would be better for all of us to go to bed," said Lady Angelina. "We may be able to do something in the morning."

Not a wink of sleep did Rose get that night. When, at three o'clock in the morning, the guns ceased, she shuddered to think of what dreadful tragedy had happened.

She pictured the tortured ship beaten into the shore, she prayed as she had never before prayed that the men might be saved. There was a chance, a bare chance, that the ship might be lifted bodily up and cast up on the beach, such a thing had happened there twice before. Little did she know what the storm was to bring into her calm life; little did she guess the pain in store for her.

At six o'clock in the morning she dropped asleep exhausted, and was awakened at seven by the sound of men's voices. She looked out of her window and saw George, Peter, and Andrew carrying a body to the door, which the drift had left free.

Opening the window she called out: "Is he dead?"

And George answered: "No, missus, he bain't dead, but he's the only one saved."

CHAPTER X

THE STRANGER

OR three days it blew, and the snow came down; for three days the stranger hovered between life and death. Then with the dying of the storm the stranger rallied.

Fortunately, owing to the direction of the wind, nearly all the sheep and cattle in the valley were saved, but great trees had been blown down, and with the rapidly melting snow the river became a torrent and the foot-bridges were swept away and a big cattle-bridge thrown, as if it had been a leaf, upon the bank.

They were forced to cut the stranger's clothes off him, and cut his hair also where it was clotted with blood from a wound in his head. In the dashing and pounding on

the beach he had been badly bruised, both his ankles were sprained, and one wrist.

He lay in the bed where they put him, wrapped in blankets, moaning at times, and at times so still that only the feeble beating of his heart told them he was alive.

There was no news of the outside world. They were isolated by the snow, and only the fortune of their store of bacon, potatoes and onions kept them going. Luckily also the cows had been housed before the storm had begun, so that there was milk for the stranger. He would waken two or three times during the day or night and drink eggs beaten up, or rum and milk in a dazed way, and drop into a heavy sleep almost directly. Only two words had he spoken, and they were the subject of much discussion downstairs—"Elizabeth and clocks."

"Elizabeth, I can understand," Lady Angelina said, "but 'clocks' beats me, unless her ridiculous surname is Clocks. He's a beautiful creature anyhow, poor dear, and I can quite imagine any woman going crazy about him. What eyes!"

"He has to have eyes," said Rose.

"Not those eyes, my dear. They are not fair in a man. They are what I call heart-string eyes, and they have pulled all the mother in me to the top. I can see Sir Bartholomew Carsdale now in those eyes. I declare his eyes nearly ruined my early life, eloping eyes they were, damn-the-consequences eyes, and I nearly did, but heaven sent me measles. Poor dear Elizabeth Clocks, I feel sure she has suffered."

"Perhaps she's his mother," Rose suggested.

"My dear," said the old lady, "I love your innocence, but let's be human: men don't, as a rule, have E and a heart tattooed on their arms all because they love their mothers."

"But," said Rose shyly, "he has B and an arrow on the other arm, and N and a true-lover's knot on his chest."

"He is a sailor, my dear, and consequently very romantic. When Henry arrives we must see what we can do for him. I, for one, should like to keep him. I like orna-

mental people, they are untrustworthy but charming. Nobody in the world has ever been able to define charm, and that is why charm is charm—it is elusive."

"It is rather nice," said Rose, "to have to look after something so helpless; to tuck somebody up in bed, to listen if they are breathing, to watch if they stir, just to feed them and pet them, and——" She broke down utterly and went down on her knees by the old lady's side. "I did so want a baby," she said. "I hate our pretence babies. I hate life. I hate everything."

"Henry?"

"No, not Henry; oh, please understand, everything is so satisfactory that it isn't interesting."

"That is what the devil said to Eve," said Lady Angelina.

"I don't mean I want anything wrong to happen," said Rose, crying very softly. "But I do want something to happen. I can't bear to think of just going on, and on, and on. I love Henry with all my heart, and we are perfectly happy, aren't we?"

"But is perfection amusing?" said Lady Angelina, "and hasn't something happened?"

"Am I very wicked?" cried Rose.

"As a very wicked person you are a complete failure," said Lady Angelina. "You are just a baby yourself, and the storm frightened you. I had a foolish nurse once who told me that thunder was God being angry, and it haunted me for years. Now we will both go up and look at our patient. I'm sure he's very good to look at, isn't he? Far too good-looking to be quite good, but I like a touch of the old Adam. If a man hasn't a vice of some kind he's dreadfully like a lot of meat without salt."

They went upstairs, and into the simple little bedroom where the stranger lay, and looked at him. He had a pale, chiselled face and jet black hair, his lips were full, his eyelashes long, and in the sweet abandonment of sleep he looked a boy.

As they stood by the bed he stirred, opened his eyes, his deep brown eyes, and smiled.

"Angels and ministers of peace," he whispered: then, "oh, my wrist!" And suddenly, like a child, but without ugliness, he began to cry.

At once, and with wonderful tenderness, Rose knelt by the bed and stroked his hair, and said, "You are with friends. Soon you will be well. Don't cry."

He composed himself with an effort and asked about the ship and the crew.

"Drowned," said Lady Angelina.

"Drowned!" he repeated. "Simpson and Harcourt and all those good chaps drowned! My God! Because of me. What a brute I am! Ladies, let me tell you, as soon as I can rise, get rid of me; I am no good, I can't help it, but I am no good to anyone. Ah! my legs, are they broken?"

"Both your ankles are sprained; you will soon be well," said Rose.

He looked at her as she knelt by him and smiled again. The smile lit up his face and gave it a rare quality of beauty, which was so like a caress that Rose flushed and her heart fluttered.

"Could I have a little food, please, dear lady?" he asked.

"I will attend to that," said Lady Angelina.

The boy began to ramble, scarcely aware of the presence of Rose. "The foremast was carried away almost at once. I shall never forget it; it took three men with it. Barton and Hamblin and a nigger: then the boy was washed overboard. There wasn't time to be frightened—then. I can hear Simpson now, shouting for someone to get an axe, some rope had parted and there was a block on it, and the thing was lashed by the wind like a fury, death to the man caught by it. She wouldn't answer her helm, and we knew it was all over. Poor old Harcourt! Everyone looked like ghosts covered with snow and then washed with the sea. I know I prayed, I prayed like hell, and it seemed a kind of comfort, but God is such a damn long way off. And suddenly it didn't seem to matter. I heard Simpson say, 'Thy Kingdom come,' and we struck. Because of me." He was crying again.

"No, no, no," said Rose in a comforting voice.

He seemed suddenly to realise she was there, and looked at her with strange, unreasoning eyes. "Get rid of me," he said. I'm no good to anybody."

Lady Angelina appeared now with chicken broth with squares of bread in it, and a glass of weak brandy and water, and at the sight of her his eyes became unclouded and he smiled again, his rare illuminating smile. "Angels and ministers of grace," he said again, and fell eagerly on the broth.

In a day or two he was sitting up in bed woefully regarding his unshaven face in a mirror.

"I will bring one of my husband's razors," said Rose, laughing at his consternation. "But can you shave yourself with only one hand?"

"Princess," he said, "I would appear before you without so many marks of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, if you please." Unshaven as he was, he managed with his lustrous eyes to convey his

compliment with a grand manner. He had a voice like deep bells.

In her bedroom Rose looked at herself in the glass and saw her face flushed, her eyes excited. "Princess," she murmured; no one had ever called her that before.

She found a razor, handling it timidly as women do, and brought it with soap and hot water to the invalid.

"Forgive me," she said, as she made to leave the room, "but we do not know how to call you."

He laughed, a low, rich laugh. "I must seem unobliging, I should have thought of that before. I am generally called Pin."

"Pin?" she said, incredulously. "Is Pin a name?"

"I have the misfortune to possess a parent who lives entirely in the past. He called me Pindar, after the greatest of the Greek lyric poets. My other name is Willoughby; I have disgraced it many times."

"Oh, no," said Rose, by the door now.

"Oh, indeed, yes," he replied cheerfully. "I have told you I am a scoundrel, and it is

perfectly true. I am the bad penny, the rolling stone, all things like that. I haven't even a shilling in the world."

"But I found three sovereigns in your clothes."

"In the lining, I'll be bound."

"Yes," she said, smiling. "I must say they were in the lining."

He became suddenly grave. "If I had guessed that," he said, "those poor fellows might not have been drowned. I'll shave now, if you don't mind."

Three days later Henry came back from London. The accounts of the blizzard had been in the London papers, and in London itself they had felt part of the fury.

Arrived at his gate, he gave a shout and was met by Rose with a finger to her smiling mouth.

"What is the secret?" he asked, hugging her.

"He's asleep," said Rose, putting her arm through his and drawing the mystified Henry into the house. "Pin is asleep."

"But, my love," he said in the living-room,

"what in the name of all that's merciful is Pin? Is Pin a joke, or a kitten, or a dog, or what?"

"Pin is a shipwrecked sailor, Henry, and I don't like you in your London clothes."

He sat down bewildered, for he thought he looked very nice in his new clothes, in his tartan waistcoat and broad striped trousers and Indian cotton stock tie.

"They were meant to be a surprise," he said.

"And they are," said Rose. "I like you, dear, in your shirt and leather apron, and I like the smell of singe about you like hair burning. Now I must see about dinner."

Henry was not a man of great perception, but he knew that Rose had in some way altered. She had always been beautiful to him, but now she had a new beauty, just as the Sleeping Beauty had when she wakened at the kiss of the Prince. He felt vaguely uneasy, aware of a new atmosphere, not quite the master of his house. He mixed himself a stiff glass of brandy and water, for

the coach ride had been very cold, and while drinking it wondered where Lady Angelina was. He had suddenly the feeling of not being the important person in the house, which is a feeling which men curiously share with dogs when something untoward is going on. Who was this Sinbad of a man who occupied so much attention?

Lady Angelina came in, and when he had kissed her she held him at arm's length and said, "So that's how the Lord Mayor dresses, is it?" which soothed him at once.

He produced two parcels from his pocket, saying: "A present for you, mother, and this for Rose."

"It isn't Christmas, my dear, or a birthday," said the old lady.

Henry visibly swelled, his chest expanded almost to the danger of his new coat. "My name was in the papers three days ago," he said. "They have made me Chairman of the Horticultural College."

"Bless us and save us!" cried Lady Angelina. "Have you told Rose?"

"Not yet," he answered. "But here she is. Rose, my dearest, my name was in the papers yesterday."

"In print," said Rose.

"In small print, but in print. In consequence of which please accept the following."

His pride, his sense of well-being was restored. Henry was himself again, a good, nice, simple child in his vanity.

The parcel for Rose disclosed a Gorgon's head carved out of larva and mounted in a rope of gold. Lady Angelina made exclamations of delight over a bracelet of Whitby jet.

"And for Martha, this," he said, producing a third parcel which was found to contain a plush-covered box on which a number of shells had been glued round a piece of looking-glass.

"Poor Pin has nothing," said Rose.

Noticing the look on Henry's face, Lady Angelina came to the rescue. "We are nursing a castaway," she said. "A rather attractive castaway, and we are rather alarmed now at the manner in which he consumes arrowroot by the bucket. I don't

know if you will like him or not, men are so odd about each other, and women are so odd about men; I know a cousin of mine ran away with a perfect angel, whom we afterwards—so did the poor thing—discovered to be a pastry-cook's assistant who died of a surfeit of brandy. Though we always called it almond paste in the family for obvious reasons. Pin is a kind of stray cat, and you are fond of cats, Henry."

"I must look at this man," he said.

But dinner arrived at that moment and Henry was patted and cosseted into his chair, and made to talk about himself, and was given the brownest of the potatoes which had been roasted under the joint, and when the port was placed by his side and the walnuts before him, the two conspirators smiled at one another, and Henry, blind to the ways of women, felt quite ready to go to see and admire the castaway upstairs.

Rose and Lady Angelina were conspirators, an instinct made them so, and Henry was regarded, for the first time in that establishment, as the male creature who

must be managed. They watched Henry mount the stairs candle in hand, and while he was away talked of ordinary affairs, perfectly well aware that they were anxiously awaiting the verdict.

"Well?" they both cried simultaneously when Henry came down again.

"Hush!" said Henry. "He's asleep."

So did Pindar Willoughby put his charm upon that group of people.

CHAPTER XI

PIN APOLOGISES

PRING came with surprising suddenness, a faint haze of tender green showed in the trees; primroses, shy at first, peered out here and there, and in the sheltered places in the Happy Valley came violets and snowdrops, and the hint of golden promise in the daffydown dillies.

Pin was young and strong, and soon was well enough to be carried downstairs by Henry and deposited in the big armchair. It was on this first evening that Lady Angelina burst out with, "I can't stand it any longer."

"What, dear mother?" asked Rose.

"Here's an inquisitive old dragon of a woman who has had to bottle up a natural curiosity for days. Pin"—they had all dropped into the habit of calling him Pin by

now—"Pin, I insist on knowing, Elizabeth and Clocks!"

The young man began to laugh so heartily that they all joined in. "Oh, did I say Elizabeth and Clocks, oh, dear me! I must tell you that, in a way, there is a sort of connection between Elizabeth and Clocks. I think I owe you the story of my life, as they say in the theatre. It isn't at all creditable, but it will show you why I am here, my very kind friends. Elizabeth is a darling; for about, let me see, it must have been all of six weeks, I adored her. I know I shall shock you,—Henry is wondering already if I ought to go on." Yes, it was "Henry" and "Rose," even in that short time. "But the fact is," he went on, "I met another, and Elizabeth told her father, in a fit of madness, and her father, in a fit of much worse madness, told mine. I was present."

"You are a disgraceful child," said Lady Angelina, as if it were a compliment.

"You would have loved the scene," he said boldly, with one of his irresistible smiles. "My learned parent arose out of a mass of

tobacco smoke, calf bindings, folios, catalogues, and paper, and welcomed the small but efficient volcano who had entered the study.

"'This young blackguard,' Elizabeth's father began, and my learned parent looked all round the study as if to sort out one from several blackguards, although I was the only one, I admit it, present. 'Pray be seated, sir,' said my learned parent as if he were addressing the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's. 'Be seated, be damned!' said the gentleman. (Forgive my very truthful story.) 'I find my daughter's affections being tampered with by this—this.'

"By that time I was really nervous for the old gentleman, his neck swelled and got so red, and his whiskers were almost damp with excitement. 'I demand reparation,' he cried. 'From the old French reparacio,' my father murmured. 'English is good enough for me,' Elizabeth's father almost screamed. 'For most of us,' said my parent, bowing with a courtly grace, 'but I fear I do not understand.'

" 'Breach of promise, sir, and thumping damages, sir, and the name of Willoughby in the mud, sir.'

" 'Dear me,' said my father," Pin continued. "And the old gentleman, though pale, was quite unruffled. 'If you will be kind enough to withdraw, sir,' he said, 'I will go into the matter with my son.'

"To cut a long story short," said Pin. "The old fury took his leave, and then with an odd mixture of cold anger and absent-mindedness, he came rather dramatically to the point.

" 'You see this letter,' he said sternly. And then he couldn't find it, but I did, and when I saw what it was I knew I was in the cart.

" 'Mr. Solomon shall have his money,' said my father. 'Because I will not be beholden to a moneylender; the gel I will attend to later, but first I wish to tell you that I know something of your mode of life, quite enough, in fact, to cause me to do what I am now about to do.'

"He fumbled for his keys, unlocked a

drawer and produced some bank notes and gold.

" 'This is your fare to Athens,' he said. 'And five pounds over. There are plenty of scamps there for your companions, gentlemen of your kidney. I am rid of you. Go!'

"We were both standing facing each other, and I swear I had never admired him so much. 'Father,' I said, 'I am very deeply sorry about the money.'

" 'Six thousand pounds squandered by a liar is a considerable sum,' was his answer. 'But allow me to inform you, sir, that Miss Barbara Paignton died last night by her own hand.'

"I left the room at once on that, partly, I think, so that he should not see my tears. And in two hours I left the house."

There was not a word spoken for quite a minute.

"Since then you have suffered," said Lady Angelina.

"It was four years ago," Pin replied. "I want you to realise that people like myself may suffer hunger, cold, the accidents of the

weather, but we are the rovers, the adventurers by Fate. If you can understand, by rather a grim Fate. We are the people who lead the gambler's life as long as we have strength and then we die in ditches."

"I'm sure you are not as bad as you make yourself out to be," said Rose gently.

He gave a sad little gesture as much as to say, "I am as I am."

Then Henry rose, and shaking himself like a dog, took his stand on the hearthrug, and gave his pronouncement. "I think it very honest in you to tell us so freely about yourself, and I hold it to count all in your favour. I, as a man of the world," Rose gave a gasp, and Lady Angelina put up her glasses with an air of surprise, "as a man of the world," said Henry, "realise that young men go through phases of life unknown to people of my class, which phases are condoned by their class. Pin, if you care to stay here and help in the forge and the fields you will learn how—how—."

He ended tamely, but Rose came to his assistance.

"How a simple home-keeping life can be very, very happy," she said.

Her look to Henry then, and his to her, was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Pin was moved, he was easily moved, and his eyes sought Lady Angelina's, the wise woman.

Deep down the old lady was troubled, but her eyes held his mute appeal, and she, putting her hand on his knee, for she sat next to him, said, "In our family we collect families; now I must hear about Clocks." And so ended the rather strained affair.

. . . . . .

"Funny I should say 'Clocks,'" said Pin quickly. "Although clock-mending is my one and only parlour trick. I can take any class of clock or watch to pieces and put it together again in perfect order. So I said 'clocks,' did I? I've been living on clock-mending for two years. There, listen to that." The grandfather clock was chiming the hour. "That's a beautiful bell, but it has worked loose; as soon as I can walk I'll put that straight."

"Come, come, Pin," said Lady Angelina. "You are an ornamental creature, not a clock-mender."

"Which is another way of saying you wouldn't trust me with a brass farthing." He licked one side of his forefinger and held it up. "See this wet, see this dry, I'll cut my throat before I'll lie."

There came to Henry's mind a picture as clear as daylight, of an old man of the name of Rush who used to wind the clocks in Mr. Frogmore's offices, an old man who might have been Time himself, with his beard and forelock, a man almost as silent as was Mr. Frogmore. And with him came back the memory of Mr. Frogmore himself, that grim man who had done so much for him. Then he saw himself, the blacksmith's son, the clerk, the landowner, able to provide for all these people out of his own pocket, able to give a shilling in church to the offertory, having his name in print, and a pleasant glow of well-being stole over him, and he straightened his shoulders and stretched his

legs farther apart, and mentally slapped himself on the back.

"Isn't that interesting, Henry?" said Rose.

"You mustn't bring the great man out of his dreams," said Pin, laughing. "Who knows but he isn't thinking of going into Parliament and making me his secretary."

"My Henry in Parliament!" said Rose scornfully: and somehow or another Henry felt the least bit of resentment as if he had been snubbed.

But Pin went on talking; he brought great England, wonderful England, into the room, with her hedges of dog rose and honeysuckle and bramble, with her gorse alight with its golden flowers and gorgeous scent; the England of the road, with her pedlars with their packs filled with mother-of-pearl buttons, and bone collar studs on cards, and cheap lace, and crochet needles, and reels of cotton; the road over which gentlemen of a pronounced sporting character, wearing overcoats a quarter of an inch thick, drove spanking bays tandem, to the envy and

delight of small boys, gentlemen on foot with pointers and spaniels, with a keeper behind carrying the game-bag and the game-sticks and the cartridges and two guns; the road over which stately barouches drove in a leisurely manner with a powdered, cockaded footman on the box, and in which sat old, old ladies like painted dolls, still upholding the weight of ancestry displayed in the coat of arms on the panels of the doors.

He told them of glasses of port in the butler's pantry, of sherry in the housekeeper's room, housekeepers in black silk with brooches made of the word Mizpah in gold; who had photographs of whiskered gentlemen in volunteer uniforms on the walls, and who were spoken of as "Master Dick," and "Master Harry," "Master Harry" who died in foreign parts.

He had mended clocks in manor-houses where masters hung rotting on the walls; he had mended clocks in farm houses where the patriarchal custom was still held, when in the great kitchen twenty or more hands sat at the long oak tables, sons and daughters,

the thatcher, the swineherd, the gooseherd, the cowkeeper, the carpenter, milk-maids, hedger, and ditchers all sat below the farmer himself, who was dressed in a clean smock, and as like as not would read a long chapter out of the Bible before beginning to carve.

They could see, as Pin talked, the boys turning cartwheels as the coaches passed by; they could see the herbalist selling his samples on market days, and in the cool of a summer's evening, some old village gaffer spelling out the news from a week-old newspaper to a circle of solemn men whose language was Elizabethan, who used tags and saws, ages old, about the weather; "Red in the morning, shepherd's warning; red at night, shepherd's delight"; men who knitted their own stockings, men who never went to bed by artificial light, who had never seen a train or the sea, who had one suit of velveteens, who never used a razor or a toothbrush, and who were utterly unaware of what is foolishly called Progress, and were the sinews and backbone of the whole country.

Whatever was evil in Pin, and there was much, it was sweetened by his absolute adoration of the country; if he loved it was a country girl, if he swindled it was from a squire. He was a wicked Orpheus with a lute of words, an atheist who prayed because of the beauty of the prayer; a man who aided the vagrant, the fallen, the poacher, the thief, and considered honest folk fair game; and withal a gentleman of his kind to the finger-tips.

During the talking they had sat spell-bound, each one of them listening in his or her own way. Rose seeing life open as a great adventure, listening to his narrative which was to her a charmed romance. Henry vaguely uneasy, wondering if his life was not, after all, a little cramped. Lady Angelina following in her mind that English road far beyond Pin's story until she could see it end in a church-yard, to a grave side at which there would be no mourners. And each in their way was right.

"Why, it is past one o'clock!" cried Pin, who had, himself, been wrapped in the

atmosphere of his words. "How I must have worn you out."

Henry carried him up to bed, as he could not yet walk, and Rose sat gazing into the fire, which had burned low.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Lady Angelina.

"They are worth a million, million pounds," said Rose softly.

"Don't be too captivated, my dear," said the old lady. "He is only a very delightful scamp."

Rose waited for a while before she answered. "I wasn't thinking of him, I was thinking of Henry. Mother, it is a new Henry."

"And you?"

"I am sure it is a new me."

"One changes," said Lady Angelina, who never had changed.

"I think," Rose answered, "that sometimes a curtain is lifted and one passes on, and the curtain falls behind one, and can never, never go back. It is like seeing the sun rise on a new day and knowing that yes-

terday is buried in the shadows of all the other yesterdays. All one's life one seems to be buying new things."

"And paying for them," said the old lady abruptly.

"A new dress, a new thought, the sight of a new flower, and all a little sad."

"It was Eve who bought knowledge, my dear, and it is Eve who will never be able to pay her debts."

"I'm not sad," said Rose, taking the old lady's hand, "I'm wistful."

"You are West Country," said Lady Angelina, patting the hand.

"So I dream, I suppose, sometimes. Do you know, there are times I am almost sorry I haven't done wicked things, because I have missed the experience. Look at those embers, mother, they were flame once."

"Look at those ashes, my dear, and come to bed."

With a sigh she rose and was going to put out the lamp when Henry came into the room. "Well," he said cheerfully. "Late birds, aren't we? I have one surprise for

you, only Pin put it out of my mind. In a month we are all going to London."

"To London!" said Rose. "Where the daffodils are out?"

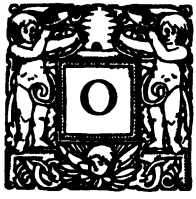
"To London," said Henry, rubbing his hands together. "To hear me make my first speech there!"

"Boys will be boys," said Rose, putting her arms round his neck and kissing him.

"And girls will be women," said Lady Angelina dryly. "Won't somebody light the candles?"

CHAPTER XII

THE SPRING FASHIONS



OH, the spring and the eager quickening life of it, and the lambs of it, and the quick bursting buds of it, and the bees and birds and butterflies of it, and the sweet new smell of it, and the no longer shy sun of it pouring into rooms and finding out dusty corners, and the bold sun pouring into people's hearts and finding out the dusty corners there, and the joy, the joy, the joy of it!

Henry, yes, certainly a new Henry, was launching out. The Government had become interested in the Sophy Curlet Gardens; a Member of Parliament actually was to be present at the first dinner given by the Board of Directors. He was to be presented with a bouquet of the new Sophy Curlet Rose, though goodness knows what the poor

man was going to do with it. And Rose was to have a new dress. No, Rose was to have two new dresses. Lady Angelina was to have a new dress. Lady Angelina brought out from the bottom of her box a Paisley shawl for Rose and a pair of amber ear-rings. Even Pin was to have a new suit. Henry, as you might say, burst into blossom like everything else in the spring.

Exeter was the favoured spot chosen out of all England, even cutting out Bath, for the birthplace of these creations: but first Fashion must be consulted.

Fashion, the most powerful of civilisation's follies, swept into the Tollgate House and obliterated the men.

Henry had commanded that the things should be of the best, of the very best, and Exeter rose in its glory, ignored its Cathedral and showered fashion plates on Tollgate House. Nature, by way of not being left out of it, showered the Happy Valley with fashion plates, aided and abetted by a southwest wind and an open window. Sheep stared moodily upon designs presumed to be

of Rose and Lady Angelina taking tea in an avenue of palm trees, of Rose in organdie and gauze with white satin boots, of Rose with a wreath of artificial forget-me-nots about her hair, of Rose in a street costume of violent emerald green and magenta, Rose in a mantle, Rose wearing white stockings which showed under a hooped and tasselled skirt; designs of Lady Angelina in black were blown into trees, and stayed there like milliners' angels, or rested among cowslips like some rare exotic flowers.

Such a hue and cry as never was resulted by reason of Spring's laughing mood. "Devil take your seamstress," said Spring. "Give me a chance."

One evening, after three days of mysterious whisperings from the women and an extraordinary interest displayed in the post by Henry, there happened a great event. A large brown paper parcel arrived for Henry, who seized upon it as if it were all the treasures of the Incas, and after asking everybody to begin dinner without him, he carried his parcel upstairs.

The roast was upon the table, Rose, Lady Angelina and Pin were seated, and Martha was standing very red from the fire, by the master's chair when Henry entered.

The effect was tremendous. Henry was clad in his first dress suit. Gone the blacksmith's boy, the clerk, the farmer of the Happy Valley, and there behold nothing more or less than a nobleman. Three coral studs nestled in a frilled shirt; Henry's square chin was buried in wreaths of cambric napery; pantaloons excessively wide at the knee and excessively tight at the ankle graced his nether limbs, a crimson silk handkerchief blooded his shirt front. Without a word he turned and turned about, regardless of the fact that grease was already forming on the mutton gravy.

"Lord, my dears, look at the master!" said Martha in rapturous tones.

"Henry, you certainly cut a fine figure, I must say," said Lady Angelina. "The garments certainly become you. You remind me in a way of Lord Arthur Oxshot."

"Quite the beau," said Pin.

And Rose, with shining eyes, went up and kissed him and said nothing.

The evening was a great success. Nobody affected to notice that Henry said, "Obleeged, I'm sure," and "Pardon my making a long arm," in the highest society manner. Lady Angelina produced her most fashionable anecdotes, a trifle spiced perhaps, and Pin was cleverly silent except when occasion demanded a word or so. Rose sat in the sunshine of her husband's magnificent content. Henry actually spoke of laying down a little wine. "After this," he said, "people might drop in, you know."

The idea of the wine stirred a fresh chord in Lady Angelina's memory. "My dear father," she said, "who liked his glass, always retired to bed with assistance before my dear mother's evening routs, but on one occasion when my dear mother had the Bishop and his lady and quite a large part of the county, my father woke, and, thinking from the sounds he heard that burglars had broken into the house, he armed himself with a blunderbuss, and entered the drawing-

room in his night-shirt and cotton night-cap, shouting, 'Stand or I fire.' Several ladies fainted, but the Bishop, dear man, came to the rescue. 'Elhi,' he said (that was my father's name), 'Elhi, what about that East India sherry?' 'We'll crack a bottle,' said my father, and marched out of the room on the Bishop's arm. Well, my dears, whether gaiters give one a strong head or not I do not portend to know, but they did, so people say, crack several bottles, and my dear father was dead in a month, and the Bishop gave the most eloquent address over him in well rounded periods, and ate a hearty dinner at my dear father's expense afterwards."

Rose knew that Henry really looked ridiculous in their little country parlour, and it gave her a tender pain in her heart, a motherly feeling towards him, knowing also that she would be just as excited when her new dresses arrived, but it hurt her to know Pin also thought Henry ridiculous, and all her instincts rose up to defend her man.

They must be ready to depart for Exeter by the end of the week, Henry announced;

rooms at the New London Inn were ready for them; Madame Nina was informed, in fact the train was laid for the display of any number of silks and satins and gauzes and velvets, such as would rejoice the heart of any woman.

They did for the sake of decency go into the wonderful Cathedral, Lady Angelina declaring it would not be polite to the Bishop if they failed to do so. "Though," she said, "I never could pray in a cathedral; they seem to be doing all the praying for me."

Pin remained outside. "Give me the sun," he said; "churches make me shiver."

Rose stood hand in hand with Henry in the great nave, awe-struck by the beauty of the place. Suddenly she knelt down and prayed silently, her lips scarcely moving. "I want to be good. I want to be good. I'm frightened of something, and I don't know what it is." That was all her prayer.

Henry knew many people whom they met in the streets, and there were bowings and introductions, and sherry and cakes at a confectioner's, and there was Madame Nina.

Madame Nina was plainly from London, and had a stock of about a dozen French words which she used in a kind of hit or miss fashion, peppering her conversation with them. She was of a perfectly smooth fatness with her waist painfully laced in, and she was dressed like a black slug. She had, also, a habit of talking behind her hand. "What a sweet creature, if I may pass the remark," she said to Henry, when he brought Rose to the shop. "Madame will look sweet in blue."

"Pink," said Henry stoutly.

"Lovely in pink. Adorable."

Rose really had very little hand in the affair, being placed in the hands of a stern young person with corrugated iron hair, who twisted her this way and that, and stood away from her and looked at her as if she were a large doll, and pounced at her, and pulled at her, while Rose stood, feeling very naked and odd, all the time she was being grenadiered into her new clothes.

And Madame would come in and frown at her and direct that this and that must be

done, and this and that undone, and tell her she looked ravishing, and frown again, and say, "Of course you will have a hairdresser." All this went on until Rose felt she hadn't a body of her own, but had been sold into captivity to Madame Nina and her severe drill sergeant.

She ventured once to say that she felt very bare in her evening frocks, but it brought such a torrent of protestation that she never dared speak of it again.

Lady Angelina flatly refused to have her dress made by "that woman," and marched herself off to an old-fashioned shop where she bullied everybody into loving her, into getting her black dress at half the suggested price in half the suggested time.

Pin wandered about by the river most of the time, but he was the only one who dined at midday with the Bishop, having called upon him to say that he knew the Cathedral clock needed attention, and so wheedled saddle of mutton and excellent claret and two pounds out of him to his own great pleasure.

The bustle of the place was a great amusement to Rose, who had not been in a town for some years: the flocks of sheep making their frightened way through the traffic guided by wise-looking shepherds and still wiser dogs; the Cathedral set passing by and not noticing the town set; the fascinating leather shops, cutlery shops, jewellers; shops where every kind of rope was sold and made Rose feel almost as if she must buy some rope, it looked so attractive. Then the farmers and their wives coming in in high dog-carts, and the gipsies with rush baskets for sale, gipsies with their air of romance, their ear-rings and their faces almost black from the sun. It was a gay time, despite Madame Nina and the severe assistant.

. . . . . .

"I have something to show you," said Pin to Rose on the day before they were to leave for home.

"Do I have to shut my eyes and guess?" she asked, laughing.

"No," he replied, laughing too. "You have to walk five miles partly to get away

from this atmosphere of cathedral canons and grocer mayors, and partly because I want to show you one of the oldest of spring fashions. Henry has given us leave. Will you come?"

"Of course I will," she answered. "If only even because it sounds so mysterious."

Down, deep down in that vague *mélange* we call experience, in that medley of new emotions and old memories we call our thoughts, Rose knew that she had ranged one man against another coldly, analytically, weighing them mentally, and was surprised to find that she was not horrified with herself.

One's thoughts are one's own private kingdom, a kingdom into which the honest minded admit no courtiers. Rose saw clearly and concisely the difference between Pin and her husband; everything Pin did or thought was elusive; everything Henry did was expected, obvious: the shadow and the substance. In this mood sex entered not at all, and one might say competition entered

not at all. You do not challenge star with star, but look at each apart: as selection is the soul of art, so is preference the soul of a community; you might, as a woman, select Pin and prefer Henry; in any case the heart would not enter into the matter of choice.

Rose knew Henry from Sunday to Sunday, but for the Pins of this world there is an extra unknown, unnamed day in the week which may last half an hour or half a lifetime. Anyhow, the day was his.

They left the town and the hustle, they passed the town crier shouting unimportant things, they passed the Pound, and came by a lane into the open country. Such talk as they had was of people and things, not of persons and Henrys, of the dairy-men with yokes about their shoulders, of the sudden wonder of a lark, a pulsing bullet of passion far up in the sky, of lords and ladies showing in the hedges, of an oak riven by lightning, until Pin, with "This way," turned into a little shaw by the roadside, a quarter of an acre of young wood through which a stream ran, and there, in a clearing, halted her and

bade her look deep into the lower branches of a knarled hawthorn.

"Do you see the nest?"

"I see it," said Rose. "And a queer ugly bird in it."

"That is the nest of a thrush," said Pin, "and the queer ugly bird is a young cuckoo. Watch."

They sat down, crushing blue-bells and wind flowers and all the lovely carpet Nature apparently so carelessly provides.

"Pin," said Rose, "you've got a new suit."

"Whom the gods love," he answered; "now wait."

Presently a strange noise came from the hawthorn, a clamorous, insistent noise, and almost at once a thrush came flying past with a worm in her beak and entered the tree, and the noise increased and then died away.

"I am a human cuckoo," said Pin. "I live in other people's nests and take their food; when I am strong I fly away."

"Stay with us and be a thrush," she answered, understanding.

"Nature, I am afraid, is going to make me eat and fly away, unless——"

"Unless?"

"Unless," he answered, "the mother bird thinks she can bring me up to be more like a thrush. Do you understand?"

"I am afraid," said Rose, "that the mother bird prefers you in your freebooting way to the tameness of the domestic thrush. I like the sense of freedom about you, the sense of world ownership. When you talk my eyes walk, the world is larger; there are many roads which do not lead to home."

"Freedom, world ownership!" he said almost bitterly. "Look at me now in a suit paid for by Henry, with the pounds in my pocket of Henry's money, about to be stood a treat in London by Henry."

"Dear Henry," she said.

"Damn Henry," cried Pin; "Henry has money, position, you!"

Rose ignored the damnation of Henry and quoted lightly the Tenth Commandment, "'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's

wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his.' "

"The veriest gipsy sometimes needs a house," said Pin.

"All we have is yours," she answered, wondering at herself.

"Rose, Rose," he said, "I am trying to give myself a chance; tell me to go now and I will go away for ever; it would be better if you did. Tell me to stay and——"

She put her hand on his quite innocently, and he quivered at her touch. "What is the good of our good fortune if we can't do what we like with it? When you are really well you can help Henry in any number of ways and"—she hesitated here—"you will—you will earn your salary as any other man would."

"I wonder if I like good women," said Pin; "they make me feel so small. You are a flower with a soul, and that is why you were called Rose. Very well, janitor of my better thoughts, I will become your servant."

The wood around them thrummed with the music of wild bees; the flowers about

them gave out an exquisitely pure scent; but the wood was young as spring is young. The trees had not the experience of older windblown trees; the flowers were tender flowers and had not the hardiness of flowers which live through half a year. And Rose unfolded her heart in these surroundings, quite unaware that the man beside her had fallen madly and passionately in love with her, nor did she know that only her perfect innocence kept him from taking her then and there in his arms.

"I only know," she said, "that in this world there is such a lack of love, even a lack of sympathy. There are degrees of love, Pin, but people never seem to understand. If I said I loved you I wonder if Henry would understand; but if I said I did not, then I should be unfaithful to myself. I don't want you to be hurt, yet there is something inside you that hurts you and hurts me. We had a stray dog once, mother and I, and someone had once hurt it, and it never could quite make friends. I don't think it had been beaten; I think it had been insulted; you can

insult a dog, you know; I have seen a dog nearly die of despair by being ignored. Life is very mysterious and wonderful, we realise its beauty by its ugliness, but somehow, in spite of that, we are often very ugly. You see, Pin, I love Henry very, very dearly, and that makes me want everybody to be happy too. He is such a darling, honest man, as clear as daylight, with the irresistible vanity of a child. Women, I think, are born grown up, and men remain children all their lives, except bitterly religious men, they have a twist somewhere that no woman can ever straighten out. The minds of women are very delicate, very what used to be called nice, I believe that even of those, people call bad women. I am not what you would call religious, I think because I have never had the habit of church, but I do know that trying to be good makes you happier, and that makes other people happier, doesn't it? You know I have never talked to anybody like this for years, perhaps not in all my life."

"Thank you," said Pin quietly.

"You do believe in God, don't you?" she asked.

"Look at this," Pin answered.

The young trees stirred a little, the flowers about them seemed to bow, the music of the insects rose to a higher pitch, the mother thrush came again to feed a stranger, the little stream was more melodious. It was as if God were walking again in a garden talking to Adam. And then, from a branch above their heads, the husband thrush burst into his carol to Nature, and Pin flung himself upon the grass and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XIII

FIREWORKS

I

THEY were in London, and Henry was "doing" them magnificently.

They stayed at the hotel called Feargarth's just off Albermarle Street, which was so respectable that Lady Angelina said it smelt of dead dukes, and she wished she had brought a tent and had it pitched in Hyde Park.

"My dear," she said to Henry, "I feel sure you have Alderman blood in your family. The amount we eat and drink, and the dignity of our hired equipage with the barrel of beer in breeches on the box make me feel rich. I bowed to a perfect stranger the other day to see what it was like to be the Queen. And he took off his hat, too."

"It would be a man," said Pin.

"Can we really afford all this, Henry?" Rose asked.

"I have been saving up to see London well and comfortably," he answered. "I have seen it for so many years as a poor man, and I find now that it is quite a different place. Some more of this pie, Rose?"

They were at dinner, four o'clock dinner because they were going to see the fireworks display at the Crystal Palace. And what a dinner! Turtle soup, a dish of jellied eels, roast loin of pork, two roast Surrey fowls, gooseberry tart and cream, and a Stilton cheese to follow: small wonder they one and all required forty winks afterwards. No, not one and all, for Pin was a small eater, a fastidious eater, he always took what was considered a lady's portion of chicken, a wing, and a slice of the breast, and to Henry's secret annoyance drank but one glass of claret at his meals.

The dead weight of the room was its hallmark of respectability. It was a stronghold of rosewood, bronze and marble. Two

gentlemen in armour idling away the time stood on the mantelpiece ignoring a gilt-faced clock; a Muse or some such lady in marble occupied a recess apparently as a kind of club for flies; every chair was decorated with Nottingham lace antimacassars; a mantel-board with side curtains assisted the fire to smoke; the pictures on the walls showed ladies bidding fond farewells to Cavaliers, or tender-eyed dogs asking their masters to have a good cry; the materials in the cruet would have over flavoured a banquet. Not a window was opened though the day was warm.

"We drive down at half after six," said Henry. "I have obtained our places. It is a wonderful world when one can do things so easily."

"It is indeed," said Pin, looking round the room, "a wonderful world."

They had indeed done London. They had done the Tower and St. Paul's Cathedral, whispering gallery and all, and they had done the Zoo, and the waxworks in Westminster Abbey, and the Sloane Museum, all

the things they had never dreamed of doing when they lived in London. And now it was to be the Fireworks, and on the following day the Sophy Curlet Gardens and then the dinner.

Henry was dreadfully agitated about his speech, which had been written for him by his old friend, Bob Prettyjohn. It abounded in quotations from the poets; Latin tags which puzzled Henry tremendously, still they sounded well, and many flowery sentences which, as Bob said, would go well at a Horticultural dinner. The family, one is sorry to have to relate, got very bored with it since Henry, every morning, rose from the dregs of coffee and the wrecks of eggs and the remains of marmalade, and began "Ladies and gentlemen." His delight in the rounded periods and in himself was so innocent and natural that no one could really feel annoyed.

II

Rose is dressing, making herself ready to go out to Norwood, feeling stimulated by

the excitement, living on the top of her nerves. While she reviews herself in the cheval glass she is doing what all women are capable of doing, thinking quite clearly of two things at the same time. She was wondering whether she liked the freckle just under her right eye, a thing she had debated on for ten years, and she was also wondering where Pin was getting all his money from. Knowing that as regards money he had no scruples in the world, she hoped it would be from Henry (perhaps that freckle is rather effective), and feeling that it couldn't be from Henry, as he had mentioned that Pin seemed to be cutting a dash, and Henry would never say that if the dash was being cut with his money. (Perhaps a not quite nice woman would know of something to take that freckle away.) And Pin had such an air about him, as if even London was a rather second rate place; he compared it with Paris unfavourably once or twice. What was it about Pin which never made him in the way? When he was wanted he was there, when he was not wanted he

seemed to vanish. One said "Where's Pin?" and as if by magic he appeared. (Perhaps a not quite nice woman would know of something to make that freckle a little browner to heighten the effect.) Pin could occasionally give Lady Angelina an affectionate little pat and one could almost see her purr. Pin would—oh, but Henry was splendid, people looked at Henry in the street, he was so manly. Was it perhaps that one liked Pin because there was a touch of woman in him? (A little lavender water, where is it?)

She hears distinctly from Henry's dressing-room, "Ladies and gentlemen, on this auspicious occasion——"

Was she thinking too much about Pin, the way he thought and talked, the way he looked?

The question slipped into her mind, and would not be ignored. It was nice to have him about one, and his voice, his wonderful smile, and the homage he gave her was delightful. Did she sometimes feel more for him than an entirely faithful wife should? The thoughts crossed and recrossed in her

mind while she was tying the strings of her bonnet.

After all, she thinks, they will soon be back in the country, and there won't be so much time to indulge in these thoughts. London excited her, swung her off her balance. After all, she thinks as she puts on her little purple coat, a little flutter of the heart kept one young, and Pin would not be with them for ever. As she thought that, she had a sudden feeling of dismay, a feeling that when Pin went there would be a great gap in her life, there would be nobody to tease, at least not quite in the same way.

Henry had suggested that Pin should become a member of the family and help in the fields and the forge. How far away the Happy Valley seemed, so far as to make it almost appear mythical.

She had forgotten that London excited her, was that it, or was it that it had never excited her before?

She was tingling with a sense of adventure when she went downstairs.

"My dear," said Henry, "how pretty you look."

And Pin gave her one of those smiles of his which were almost a caress.

III

It was one of those evenings when a beautiful bloom stole over London, soft, mysterious dusk stealing into night. One of London's wonderful evenings which made the dreariest streets enchanted; the blurred outlines of roof and house fading into a sky, now turquoise, now lapis lazuli, now a deep tender violet, in which stars appeared in a heavenly pageant.

"I am not going to speak," said Rose, "I am just going to let London swallow me."

In the slowly moving crowd it really was like that, being absorbed by London.

Pin was by her side making a way for her; Henry followed with Lady Angelina. They had arranged to meet at a certain exit, if by any chance they were separated by the crowd after the fireworks were over.

As they made their way, Rose hung back and whispered to Pin, "I don't want to go to these places, I want to stay in the crowd, it is like being in the sea. Listen to their voices, like waves, aren't they? Why have I suddenly changed, Pin, why do I think of things differently? Is it London, or has something happened to me? I'm excited and very happy, but quite a different happiness to anything I have ever known."

As they moved in the sway of the crowd, Pin took her hand and pressed it on his heart. "I feel it too, don't I? It is all this life round us, all so eager, all in a holiday mood, as if there were no cares in the world. Here are the steps, we can stand on them."

The voices of the crowd rose and fell, the great voice of London pulsing. The effect was strangely like a multitude of swaying black ghosts with pink faces gathered to watch something as yet unknown, but which animated every one of them.

Above in the velvet sky the eternal sentinels burned serenely. A little way off they

could see, vaguely, spars and standards almost resembling gallows.

"Those are for set pieces," said Pin.

The mortar was fired, and as a sound like the crack of doom tore the air, the voices of the crowd became one voice, a long-drawn "Ah!"

Stabbing the air, a vivid, vicious, hissing snake of golden flame mounted in a challenge to the calm unchanging stars, then with twenty muffled reports, blue and green and purple, white and gold and red fires broke out in the sky, and for an instant Rose could pick out the features of the people round them, faces all upturned, all with the same tense eager expression of wonderment. The lights died out, the people were black ghosts again.

After that it was all magic. Hand in hand, tight clutched, Rose and Pin stood, and watched the glories of golden rain, coloured fires, Roman candles, Catherine wheel whirling and spouting flames. Now the crowd would sigh like some monster,

now it would be silent, as sheaves of rockets ripped through the air and dimmed the stars with burning jewels of light. Giant crackers went off, spitting like angry animals. Vesuvius appeared in a set piece; a full-rigged ship appeared and vanished, ground flares cut into the darkness and etched the crowd against their light.

It was over; the last great set piece of the *Queen* had burnt away; the crowd dissolved slowly. The stars shone in peace, burning coldly and serenely in the sky no longer tortured.

Rose was as one drugged with emotion, and as she made her way, guided by Pin, she felt that she would like to live for ever in the spell that was over her, never to wake up from this delicious dream even with the fatigue it brought, even the numbing of all ordinary senses, even with the sense of intoxication the emotions had smothered her with; just to walk with Pin in the enchanted night with the black ghosts about them, but not of them, a Nirvana of the soul.

Pin made no attempt to find Henry and

Lady Angelina, but found a four-wheeled cab instead, with that eighth sense some men have for conjuring cabs out of nowhere and persuading them to go anywhere. He helped Rose into the cab, gave the driver, an old man like a cabbage in capes, his directions, and they clattered off slowly into the night.

"Rose," he whispered. "Rose, my beautiful Rose, this is a night not in a year, but out of centuries of dreams."

She made no resistance, body and soul were in a delicious languor, as he took her in his arms, and as he kissed her a sigh came from her as if part of her being had escaped for ever and floated out into the ether.

In a few minutes, her head on his shoulder, her bonnet awry, she was asleep.

The stars, passionless eternal sentinels, burned serenely in the sky. London grew slowly towards them, the yellow of the gas lamps seemed to sway dizzily on the pavements, proving that London was indeed paved with gold; market carts piled high

with vegetables, private hansoms click-clicked by. Rose awoke.

She saw Pin's face by the light of a street lamp; whispered, "Don't speak," and immediately began to put her bonnet straight.

Henry and Lady Angelina were waiting for them.

"I have calmed Henry," said Lady Angelina, "with cold beef and pickles, cheese and a strong man's portion of hot rum and water. He wanted to call out all the Police Force and the Life Guards to search for you, but I wouldn't let him. I knew you were safe with Pin. In my young days, Pin, I should rather have enjoyed being lost with you."

"Dearest," said Henry, "you look white; tell us about it in the morning."

"I'm very tired, please," she answered, "I think I'll go to bed."

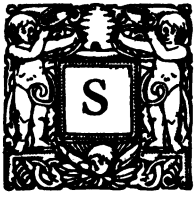
She left them at that, without a "good-night" to anyone. And Pin, manlike, sat down to the cold beef and pickles.

CHAPTER XIV

ROSES

I

"Though roses are red, and roses are white,
There are none so red as your lips, my sweet,
Nor white as your thoughts are white."



SO sang Pin as they drove down to the Sophy Curlet Gardens. And Rose blushed, and thanked him in her heart.

With that conscience that makes liars of us all, Rose had decided that the affair of the night before had never really happened, that it took nothing away from Henry, and yet, despite this, she treasured the memory with a joy that ached. Desired, preferred, what more could woman want?

"London agrees with you," said Lady Angelina, sharply observant.

"I am very, very happy," Rose answered, with shining eyes.

"One's sense of happiness must not be marred by the fact that Henry is repeating his speech under his breath," said Pin.

"Tease," said Rose.

"I was," Henry replied. "I shan't be happy until I've got it over."

They drove out of London, beautiful, pearl-grey London, wonderful, red-brick London, with its history unfolding before them in the names of streets, old houses, signs of inns, and came at last to Chiswick, and the Gardens, a dead man's living gift to an undying love.

The Gardens had once been the park and farm of a certain Lord Barshane, and it was to what had been his house they drove down an avenue of lime trees.

It was one of those houses which are the last and best expression of an Englishman's taste, dignity and comfort. Of perfect proportions, built of red brick in the last years of Queen Anne's reign, it faced a series of terraces, a sunk lawn, a long pond and a wonderful yew hedge ten feet deep.

As they got down from the carriage they

felt singularly insignificant, and with the sense of being in the wrong clothes. Two peacocks on the upper terrace looked at them, and turned away; trippers!

At the door they were met by Miss Prout, Matron Superintendent of the Gardens, a capable quiet woman, who received them rather as if they were a school treat, smiling at them in the way with which the wives of vicars greet their guests at parish garden-parties.

It was noticeable that this set smile faded when Pin was introduced to her. She could not place him, and she could not patronise him. He smiled at her and she became a human being. The ice was melted just at the right time, since Lady Angelina was on the verge of becoming an iceberg with a red hot vocabulary. That smile allowed Henry to become an eager boy, Rose a charming and natural young woman, and Lady Angelina a kindly critic.

The magic some men have that brings dogs whimpering with joy to them, which makes children take their hands unafraid,

which makes old ladies feel young, and married women forget their vows, was Pindar Willoughby's gift. Old-fashionedly one would call it fatal charm.

Now roses claimed them, roses carefully nurtured in houses to make the earliest possible display, because the members of the Board were to pay a state visit that afternoon.

The Sophy Curlet Rose was of a pink that has married yellow, an exquisite tender flower, like the girl herself. She had a house apart.

Among the roses, Miss Prout revealed her inner self, she became a strict, adoring mother, nurse and doctor of roses; she became a strict, adoring mother of Sophy Curlet. The imagery of Mr. Frogmore's idea had flown to her heart, as wine to the head. There seemed to be a sixth person with them, a sweet-scented girl billowing before them in a ridiculous, delightful crinoline.

Mr. Frogmore, Mr. Frogmore of the city, with hard deals and aloof manner, with your

trim whiskers and correct style, what have you done to so melt our hearts? Here is Love growing, blooming, fragrant, bud and flower and leaf and stem. China roses wearing their simple hearts on their sleeves; hardy Scotch briars of a windy yellow as primroses and the south wind go together; moss roses exhaling sentiment; the Seven Sisters breathing spice; the rose of York and Lancaster hailing battle; tea roses whose fluttering petals ease the cold of Omar's Persian tomb; the cabbage roses, country cottages of scent; the sweet-briar, pungent; nephetos, Marechal Niel; Gloire de Dijon, all you, all you old roses hereto give praise to God and honour to England, and to perfume the memory of a young girl who loved and died, and respect to a man who had a dream and framed it in a flower.

They saw the gardeners at work, many of them women in bloomers; they were shown the library, the recreation rooms.

"But whose taste is this?" Pin asked, looking at the Adams furniture, the Chippendale book cases.

"Not mine, I can tell you," Henry replied. "I was for something more solid, but there's a man on the Board who argued that this sort of stuff suited the house, so I gave in; besides it was cheaper."

"I feel in a way as if Sophy Curlet had chosen the things," said Rose.

"You are quite right," said Miss Prout unexpectedly. "It is her taste, the dear ghost."

"Give me flesh and blood," said Lady Angelina, "and a glass of something strong, for I declare I'm walked off my feet."

Miss Proud, who, in the course of the past hour, had got to know her Lady Angelina, smiled and led the way to her own room where suitable refreshments had been set out.

"I don't know where Caraway is," said Lady Angelina, munching her cake. "But the seeds are excellent."

"Caraway is an umbelliferous plant," said Pin.

"How on earth did you know that?" Rose asked.

"Scamps such as I have vagabond memories far too good for our comfort."

"Memory is a queer thing," said Lady Angelina, helping herself to a second large glass of Madeira. "I remember a crusty young bachelor, old at thirty, who was so absent-minded that he went to the wrong house one night to dinner, and actually dined there, and made himself so agreeable that they never undeceived him, and he never could remember afterwards where he had been."

But it was really roses that claimed them, that held them in sweet bondage by their colour and perfume, by the loveliness of their growth. Roses and the quiet of the place, the orderliness of the place sank into them as gardens will.

II

That evening before dressing for dinner, while Lady Angelina was resting, and Henry was restless, and Pin was out, Rose suddenly saw her husband in perspective.

It was rather a wonderful achievement of Henry's to have accomplished so much, to be in the position he was in, and to occupy it so well. It meant a talent for organisation, understanding people, taking the lead, inspiring people to work. It meant even that he had been a faithful servant to the memory of Mr. Frogmore and to Mr. Frogmore's passionate ideal.

She wished that Henry could have spoken from his heart that night instead of the dreadful pompous oration he had learned so carefully. The word pompous hit her head. Was Henry a little pompous? It could not be, and yet——

She wished Pin were not coming to the dinner. She felt a tenderness for Henry suddenly that made tears come into her eyes, a curtain had lifted and she was seeing life differently. Henry was her possession and, all said and done, must not be made a fool of even in one's mind. He must not be a ridiculous figure, not to-night of all nights. There would be men there, whose habit it was to go to public dinners and make charm-

ing speeches at a moment's notice, men who called upon the diners to respond to the toast of the "Ladies."

How did she know this, she wondered; perhaps women grew to know these things, just as kittens grew to know that mice were both fun and food. It was the protective instinct rising in her, the mother instinct; Henry became her child who was about to be shown off in public, who must be allowed to be a little nicely vain, who must succeed. And then the country afterwards and everything simple. Oh, what a task Life was!

Pin, one would not have bothered about Pin. Pin would make a wonderful speech, easy, to the point, hinting at the romance of the whole business, paying a tribute here and there to people like Miss Prout, not as "our estimable Matron," but in some gracious way.

She wished with her whole heart that she could make Henry's speech for him, because then he could not be hurt. She felt he was going to be hurt, childish vanity is the easiest thing to hurt.

She found herself suddenly in floods of tears on the sofa wishing to be dead. And she found Pin arriving a little later with a glass of sal volatile. Instinct, instinct! He knew.

It was like having a woman to talk to, some woman who produced toilette vinegar and soul comfort at the same time as the necessary man's large handkerchief.

Dimly, from the room above, Henry was to be heard dressing an hour too early and rehearsing his speech. They both smiled.

"We must be ladies and gentlemen ourselves," said Pin, standing well away from her now, so that she could sniff the last of her tears in comfort. "We have done too much, and we are tired, and it is quite natural, all except Lady Angelina, the dear, who is made of piano wire and rosewood; and we will look enchanting in our new clothes and make all the dull, stupid people who will be there think they are entertaining a fairy. And Henry will be the handsomest man in the room, and because they will have had a good dinner they will forgive that

damnable speech, and we shall all be very happy. Now, come along; our tears are over."

She turned round and saw Pin with one of his beautiful smiles flooding her, as it were, with love and tenderness. With some kind of inspiration she held out his handkerchief to him and said, "Dry my tears, Pin; I didn't blow my nose."

He took the handkerchief and trembled as he did so.

"If you were a woman——" she began.

"If I were anything like a decent man," he said very quietly, "I should walk straight out of this place for ever."

III

Faint heart, the feeling of being cold in a new dress, the feeling that the bouquet of roses clashed a little with the pink of the dress, the grip of new shoes, the curious sensation of having one's hair dressed differently, and so being a stranger to one's head, and all eyes looking, and all people thinking,

"So this is the chairman's wife!"—all these things gave Rose a shy charm which added vastly to the opening ceremony of the dinner.

She was adorable.

In an over gilt reception-room with over powdered footmen and over pomaded gentlemen with brillianted whiskers and an abundance of shirt front, Rose looked like one of the roses in her bouquet. She handed the mass of flowers to the utterly unimportant Member of Parliament with such a charming grace that he became human and said, "Thank you, my dear," and had to cough loudly, pretending to drown what everybody had heard.

There was a moment for her when men seemed intolerable—a moment which often occurs to the dainty woman's mind; soup eating in public is not a pretty sight.

She glanced at Pin during the dinner. He appeared to do nothing but eat olives and drink champagne. Lady Angelina was going through the menu like a starving Guardsman on a holiday. Henry was

engaged in conversation with the rouged bone, who was the token that the Member of Parliament was married. The man on her right was making furtive notes on the tablecloth with a pencil he had to lick to make it mark. There was only one fine face at the table except Pin's——a man with a face carved by illness, grey, with grey hair, and with those eyes that think backwards. She didn't know it was the man who had chosen the furniture for the house they had seen that morning. He was the only man at the table drinking water.

The man on her left began to talk. Through a haze of food and clatter of knives and forks his voice suddenly became persistent. "You must forgive me," he said; "but if one sits next to a flower one wishes one could talk like the sun. You don't know who I am, so it doesn't matter; nobody is anybody much really. This dinner—and, dear me, I have dined at hundreds of these kind of dinners—is very different. Not one of these people here, I'll be bound, knows as I do, as you do, that this is a pagan tribute

to a most beautiful and fragile idea. We inherit this grossness from the Romans, but very likely they were quite right. We are giving a dinner to a rose, and I suppose there are about five people in the room who understand it. I knew Mr. Frogmore—I will go so far as to say I loved Mr. Frogmore—though, naturally, he never knew it. I am supposed to be a great botanist, and I know about as much about plants as a child about the stars or the dark. I am talking to you like this, my child, because you are nervous. Quite rightly so, not only because the sight of a number of beasts at food is unpleasant, but because you feel for your husband. I have made so many speeches that now when I have to make one I only talk to myself aloud. The first speech I ever made entitled me to be hung without benefit of clergy. It was forgotten. Nearly everything in this world is forgotten except the woman a man really loved, and that is why we are here. But, fortunately for me, I have fallen in love a second time."

With an old-fashioned gesture he raised

his glass to her, and she bowed shyly; but the comfort he had given her was beyond words.

"You are a very far-seeing philosopher," she said shyly.

"If by that you mean I have seen men and affairs and have retained my sense of humour, you are right. I have known four noble men in my day—one was a shepherd, one was a sailor, the third was a doctor, and the last, you may be surprised to hear, was a Chinese merchant. He and the shepherd came nearest to each other in ideas. They were both profoundly simple, transparently honest, and they both loved a good joke. I remember my shepherd saying one day when I asked him what he was thinking about, 'I am thinking about grass.' At the time I thought it the simple calling he followed gave rise to the remark; but one day, in the Desert of Gobi, I, too, began to think about grass, and I understood what it meant to mankind. After that I made a study of grasses, and I understood why David called upon all creation to praise the Lord."

"And the doctor?" she asked, deeply interested. "And the others, what did they tell you?"

"The doctor said something which seems at first very different. 'No one I meet,' he said, 'ever seems to realise the bravery and wonderful honesty of the lower middle classes.' From the Chinaman's many remarks—I lived with him for over a year—I was most struck with this: 'In your Christ's sayings the most profound is this, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."' "

"What did the sailor say?" asked Rose.

The old man laughed. "He was a grizzled-headed post captain, and his remark—the one which stuck to me most——was this: 'When will those damned politicians realise the astounding marvel of the British seaman's character?' Then, all four men had the same view of life, the same outlook."

"Which is?"

"Simplicity," he answered.

"When you are in trouble whom do you

go to?" she asked, knowing suddenly that she had not a friend in the world.

"The person next to you," he answered promptly. "Everybody has been in trouble."

"I want to thank you," she said. "I don't talk to people very much, though I have only just found that out."

She looked up, and found Pin's eyes fixed upon her—Pin with an almost dangerous gleam in his eye like a signal of fun—and she realised that she had gone through the long meal almost mechanically eating, and that they had arrived at the sweets.

There was a crushing odour of food in the room—food, gas, people red after the heavy meal and the champagne. It was a public room, the home of rich meats, expensive flowers; a bloated room that probably whispered the names of dishes to itself after dark.

Rose looked round the company, and she wondered why they were there—such a lot of flesh and shirt front and hair and jewelry, the faces so pink. She smiled to herself, thinking what rich eating they would appear to a cannibal; and then her eyes encountered

those of the man with the face carved by illness. Their eyes met and held, and after a fraction of a second she turned to the man by her side and said, "I know now really what you have been saying—I mean the underneath of it, as it were—and I am not quite sure that I agree with you. Life is a very dangerous experiment."

"It is always round the corner," said the old man.

She caught her breath. Last night, and those solemn stars, and her sudden and voluntary release of herself, as somebody might take courage suddenly and swim. Yes, voluntarily, adventurously taking courage, and seeking deep waters. There was Pin opposite to her; Pin, whose lips had been pressed to hers, to her abandoned lips, only last night; Pin, who was toying with olives and holding the woman on either side of him with light, easy conversation. And she looked from him to her husband, and from her husband to the man with the tired eyes and decided—nothing.

Breaking into this came a deep voice.

"Pray silence for the toast of Her Majesty the Queen."

Henry, on his feet, calm as to the manner born, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you 'The Queen.' Pray charge your glasses."

Her heart beat, her heart beat, her heart beat; he was to make this terrible speech.

Inevitable, like the dawn, came the voice of the toastmaster. "Pray silence for the chairman."

Henry again upon his feet: a drowsy, well-fed silence. Pin, under cover of taking another olive, glanced across at Rose and gave her an almost imperceptible wink. In a flash there came to her a picture of the breakfast-table, the dregs of coffee, and the ruins of eggs.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Henry began.

Then Rose laughed; nothing could stop her. Something loosed the demon of fun inside her. She laughed until she choked, until she cried. It all seemed so ludicrous after the Happy Valley and the nodding daffodils, and the sound of the sea, and Martha and the little house.

She found herself being led out, being given smelling-salts, and finally coming to in a little ante-room full of plates and dishes and empty bottles.

"I couldn't help it," she said to Pin, who was bending over her, and began to cry again.

And the great speech was never made.

CHAPTER XV

SUNDAY

I

IT was Sunday and hushed and warm: even the cows seemed to know, and ate twice as much as they did on any other day, just like Christians. The butterflies broke the Sabbath as they always do, and the bumble bees, not half as humble as their name, went about their ceaseless business, thrushes outsang the village choir, and blackbirds whisked and screamed in the most pagan fashion. But all the village dogs were asleep in the sun, waiting for the morning service to be over, and cats, contemptuous of all other living creatures, did as they pleased.

It was Sunday morning, and in the afternoon pigs would peer with their inquisitive

little eyes at the best suits and cleanly shaven faces of their masters, and hens come running to their food, knowing that the clean white apron of the farmer's wife covered a neat black dress.

On Sunday, for some reason, England always goes into mourning, the best each in his station can afford, except that it is not true of the ladies of fashion who, like the butterflies, break the Sabbath to the extent of using the church for the purpose of dazzling the congregation with the newest modes. "Did you see that hat Mrs. So-and-so had on in church?" "Yes, my dear, and didn't Farmer Giles' new boots squeak something chronic coming down the aisle?"

It was Sunday, and there would be men all over England walking over the fields, discussing the crops, the state of roots, the price of cattle food, the illness of a friend in detail; all over England it would be warm and hushed and mellow. The first real noise of the morning would be made by choir boys tearing out of church, or in manufacturing towns the shrill cry of gossips, partly

dressed, calling scandal from window to window.

Pin lay that morning on the short sweet grass in the Happy Valley, while the others had gone to church. Nature absorbed him at first, the pleasant warmth of the sun, the cloud shadows on the opposite woods, the play of light, the two sounds, merged into one, of the distant sea's ceaseless whisper and the busy melody of the stream.

Almost he wished that life could continue like this for ever, that no disturbing thoughts could enter into his mind, that he could grow peacefully like all the things around him, sleep all the winter, feel the lazy energy of the early spring, and then the pulsing joy of early summer.

Rose was his for the asking, and he knew it, he rejoiced in it and feared it. In taking Rose what was he killing in himself? Never before had he felt as he did now, not once in his many adventures. To Henry, to Lady Angelina he gave no single thought deeper than, "They'd get over it."

In the planning—and there had been plan-

ning, for he was no slow traveller in affairs of passion—he had rejoiced, now it seemed somehow stale, second-rate. One should up and off and away in a storm, no whither, with no design, but to have seen to it that a Steam Packet left Plymouth for Havre at midnight, to have gathered the cost of posting to Paris, and thence through Switzerland to Venice; this savoured more of the work of a man of affairs setting out on a holiday than of a lover eloping with the wonder, the marvel, the queen of women.

The faint odour of river mud and water mint stole across his senses, a peacock butterfly came dancing across the sunlight, the air was aromatic with thyme and mint, cow parsley and warm grass. It bemused his senses, took away his desire for anything but for the world to go on like this for ever.

With Rose in Venice, so his thoughts drifted, with Rose on the Grand Canal, marble palaces, black gondolas, vivid sails of fishing boats. With Rose feeding the pigeons opposite to St. Mark's, a radiant excited Rose. And should the whisper of

conscience cause a shade to cross her face he, Pin, would tell her how beautiful she was, and the shade would pass.

They would have one gorgeous holiday while the money lasted, and then—oh, well, it must be like the raggle-taggle gipsy O!

"Clocks to mend, watches to mend," all along the rich valley of the Rhone with the rushing river and the ruined castles on the heights, and the names of towns like beads of perfume strung on the twisted silk of memory: Orange, Montelimar, Nimes, Tarascon, Arles, Aigues Mortes. They came before him vividly with the burning blue of the sky, and the road so white it almost hurt the eyes; the fluttering poplars, and the white oxen drawing the ploughs; the little cafes with tawny-coloured awnings, and oleander trees in blue tubs blistered by the sun; the philosophic colour of the olive trees and the requiem note of the cypress, the amber and amethyst bearing vine, and the wild growth of bush carnations.

He looked, as it were, from an immense height, and saw Rose and himself, two

figures crossing the lovely land of France.

It must be done swiftly, unawares. Love would catch them in his toils in one supreme moment, and then he must be ready. A post chaise, a ship, a frightened girl, and then joy, and joy, and joy.

Swift as an arrow came another thought; the Happy Valley had its enchantment right enough. Pin was a boy again. Who had given him his tapestry vision of life? His father. Odd that he should see that now; odd that the vision should come to him of himself walking in the garden at home, hand in hand with his father, listening enchanted as the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece unfolded itself, and Helen lived again, and Circe, and Dido, and Hector, Abelard, and Dante, exiled Virgil, and Arthur and his knights.

> "Only workmen working early
> In among the bearded barley;
> On the road to Camelot."

His father dwelt among the great people of the past, he remembered now; in a sort of golden gaze. He remembered that all sense

of his father's incongruous clothes used to pass away while they walked in the garden, inhaling the spice of garden scents and seeing only the great dead pass before them in endless procession.

He was a boy again, and, in his mind, swam stark naked in tree-fringed pools, and saw the scythes and sickles flash and glitter as they swept like a priestly procession through the golden wheat. There was the time of hay when drying clover beautified the air, the time of ploughing when the earth turned over in obedience to the plough, the time of blackberries when horses sweat, the time of crisp, sparkling mornings when robins sang, and the time of snow when it was fun to make your own small footprints, marking its calm virginity with the pedograph of man.

He would go to his father and make reparation, and thank that solitary man for the great gift he had bestowed upon him—a gift between man and boy in which no woman shared.

Resolved, he rose to his feet, and well

before the Litany was finished in the village church Pin was tramping the roads, the curtest of notes left behind him, a stick of Henry's in his hand, three handkerchiefs in his pocket, but, oh, for resolutions, there was a sprig of forget-me-nots left on Rose's pillow.

II

The booming voice of Mr. Torridge sounded through the slumberous atmosphere of the church, the little, stone, Gothic, weather-beaten landmark of a church which could be seen far out to sea and had helped many a mariner home.

He was reading the Gospel, and the rise and fall of his voice was a complete soporific; the congregation nodded visibly. The beadle kept a severe eye on the eight children of the tiny Charity School; Farmer Giles, heaving great sighs, kept his eyes on an open window; Lady Angelina sat bolt upright; and Rose, quite oblivious to her surroundings, wondered what would happen in the end between herself and Pin.

"I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son. . . ."

Rose heard these words clearly; they struck across her musings. She put her hand to her heart and bowed her head.

"Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in Thy sight . . ."

Lady Angelina passed a bottle of smelling-salts to Rose and whispered: "It's the heat."

It was not the heat; it was the sudden stinging significance of the words that made Rose go white and hold her hand over her heart. She knew then that Pin must go, that she must cleave to Henry, that this wild heart-aching romance must come to an end. To Henry, to the Happy Valley, to her house and garden, to a long series of sheltered, uneventful years she must submit herself, and her heart turned sick within her, and she knew fear.

And she knew love; she knew love as she had never known it before. The door of the cage was open; the wide, wonderful world

lay before her, and she must, of her own free will, close the door upon herself.

She looked round the church and wondered if she were the only unhappy person in it. Henry had his church face on, a kind of deferential butler's expression; Farmer Giles appeared to be listening eagerly as if awaiting a signal; there were numerous old women with deeply lined faces—faces that looked as if they were carved out of very old ivory; one or two self-conscious fishermen in their best blue jerseys sat together, their faces shining with soap, their vivid blue eyes gleaming out of the deep tan of the sea and sun. The squire and the parson might have been brothers, "horse" was written all over them, they had the lips of grooms and a tremendous sense of the open air.

The big dairy farmer Wills sat with his buxom wife, four buxom daughters, and three huge sons, the whole family looking so alike that they appeared to be a set.

Suddenly a low whistle was heard coming from outside, and an expression of relief came over Farmer Giles' face; he rose noisily

and whispered over his shoulder to Farmer Wills, "Blossom's going to calve," a whisper heard all over the church. Then he tip-toed down the aisle and let in a breath of sweet air as he opened the door.

Were they all happy, Rose wondered, and if so why had she been chosen to bear this intolerable pain?

She looked at the painted slab in front of her, which was inscribed with five of the Commandments, then at the altar with its plain brass cross and two brass vases of geraniums on either side. She looked at the several lozenges bearing the Wollacote coat of arms, at the green curtain which hid the organist; heard the still booming voice of Mr. Torridge raised in prayer, remembered it was Litany Sunday with endless "Good Lord, deliver us" repeated, and wondered for the first time what it all meant.

It seemed to her that she stood outside all religion, all family ties, all relation to village life, and stood alone. There were Chinamen and Indians and Hottentots whom she was given to believe would become Christian at

the mere sight of a new flannel petticoat, and she knew there was a group of really splendid men waiting outside for the "Woolacote Arms" to open, and she knew the village cobbler was having a service entirely concerned with hell and damnation at the Little Bethel, and she knew that Martha could not come to church because she was cooking the Sunday dinner, and she knew Martha didn't mind, and she was all, all alone.

Then she found that she was kneeling whilst everyone else was standing up. The service was over. In a way the strain was over. But one thing she did not know was that Lady Angelina had a very close suspicion of what was going on.

III

Martha, it was true, was cooking the dinner, but it was a meal for Pin only, as the others were dining with the Vicar. Martha's religious or Sunday frame of mind expressed itself in the singing of hymns to a chicken roasting on a spit. The sun shone on to a

bowl of flowers on the window-sill, a warm breeze wafted away the smell of cooking, the kitchen was immaculate. Martha, in a clean print dress and a clean white apron, was the goddess of a shrine of great tranquillity, little guessing that destiny was not going to allow of Pin's partaking of the roasted fowl.

Like all good servants, Martha pondered on the well-being of her master and mistress; she would have backed herself any day against the Vicarage cook except, perhaps, in the matter of sillabubs. She had been kitchen-maid under the cook, and they remained friendly enemies still, in consequence of which she knew exactly what they were to have for dinner that day: roast loin of pork with the kidney, gooseberry tart and cream, pancakes and Stilton cheese. The claret would have been opened just before the morning service to arrive at the temperature of the room, the port, lovingly brought from the cellar by the Vicar, would be standing, decanted, on the sideboard. They would use Aunt Maria's glass, which they did on the first Sunday of every month, and

Mrs. Atkinson Fullgrove's dessert service, and the gravy spoon that had belonged to George III. Sunday, the first Sunday of the month, was ceremonial.

Mrs. Torridge would relate quaint sayings, without point, of the village; Mr. Torridge would speak of a covey of partridges he had noticed, throw in a word of a new fly he had recently tied; Lady Angelina would do her best to shock Mrs. Torridge; Henry would introduce politics; and Rose would look delightful and parry all questions. An ideal Sunday party.

The Vicar and his wife were absolutely the right people for the parish: he believed in a very English god, in port wine, hunting, sailors, the Queen, and Tories. Mrs. Torridge knew the exact state of every piece of linen in the house, every new scratch on the polish on tables or silver, made damson cheese and cowslip and elderberry wines, made her own mustard plasters, lime flower tea, and liquorice water.

Many a time the Vicar sat by a death-bed in his hunting breeches and gaiters, with his

horse tied to the gate; many a time had he, with his clean, decent, sporting view of heaven, given consolation to dying men, and his wonderful tenderness had helped many a woman through child-birth when the doctor was perhaps thirty miles away on the Moor doing the same office, parson and doctor too.

They were wholesome people. Their most intimate underwear proclaimed itself boldly on the lavender hedge in the front garden. The Vicar had once literally horse-whipped an agnostic to church, and had once harboured, or so the village put it, a Roman Catholic priest in the Vicarage. "And a damn good chap too, I don't mind saying so."

Martha, as did most women, centered her affections on Pin. He used to go into the kitchen at all sorts of odd times and kiss her boisterously on the cheek. "It's a Saint's day," he used to say for excuse, and the measure of her love for him could be gauged in her reply.

"Go on, Master Pin, you keep your kisses for them as want 'em."

So, naturally, the chicken must be done to a turn.

Sunday afternoon being Martha's afternoon off, she generally paid a visit to the bad girl. Nobody would have made a fuss about the "bad girl" if she had not made a fuss about herself. She was so openly proud of her two black-haired, black-eyed children, and of the fact that the father had been a fine gentleman, that it seemed she gloried in her shame.

"Show me the like of John and Betsy," she would say, "and then you can preach to me. I didn't put my foot in no church, no, my dear, but if they bain't angels then they're the nearest to it I'll ever meet."

Her name was Sarah Trepan, a dark beauty with a strain of gipsy in her, and she made her living by helping at the nets, knitting guernseys for the fishermen, and changed a five-pound note once a quarter at the post office. With this bank-note there was always a letter in a fine Italian hand, generally two closely written sheets, and

these letters gave Sarah the greatest comfort, though she could not read a word of them.

She lived in a tumble-down cottage close to the shore, near to a disused slate quarry; was as a rule very silent. Martha was her only friend until Lady Angelina appeared on the scene, and, in spite of Henry's protestations, Rose.

She adored Rose, who was her exact opposite, and the children adored Rose also. Rose played with these children by the hour —John was six and Betsy was five—and the three played all manner of exciting games down on the beach, the only toys being stones and pieces of stick. It was quite obvious that the children had gentle blood in them, their hands and feet were fine, and though they spoke with the soft West Country burr, it had more the effect of a foreign accent than of clumsy English.

On the previous Sunday Sarah had vaguely alarmed Martha by talking about Pin.

"I keep my eyes open and my mouth shut as a rule, my dear," she said, "but I wouldn't have my lady hurt was it never so."

"Who's going to hurt her?" asked Martha.

"There's some as has got the eyes, I know it," said Sarah mysteriously. "You only have to be unwed and have two witnesses against you in the shape of those angels to know it."

John and Betsy, innocent of garments, were playing on the edge of the water.

"That Mr. Pin of yours would melt a rock by looking at it, I know. I've got a sense of men same as men's got a sense of me, and it's a good thing for me I was in a boxing booth before I went into service. Many a man I've caught a clip under the chin as has made him wonder. Sam Billborn now, I only had to hit him once and now, why Lord, I get my rabbits and such-like for nothing, only don't 'e tell. Martha, I fair do worship that woman, girl I might say, and I'd tell the man, what—there, perhaps I've got no call to say so. If they children do be naughty like, I've but to say I'll tell the pretty lady

and they're as good as gold—for a minute or two, the angels. Don't say no word, Martha, but keep an eye on my lady if only for my sake."

"Mr. Pin do be a gentleman," cried Martha, indignantly.

"I've met such," Sarah answered calmly. "The kettle's boiling.

"They don't so much, as you mid say, arrange meetings, and the like, nor they don't hold up a finger," said Sarah during tea. "They looks and walks careless like, and the woman follows. Half the time she don't likely know why she follows, curiosity as like as not, vanity sometimes, and sometimes something that draws her on. Husband, children, home, she'll leave the lot and go wandering. I followed a man and I know."

"There's being in love," said Martha.

Sarah took no notice of this remark; instead she filled two mugs with milk, cut two crusts of bread, buttered them and covered them with whortleberry jam. This done, she put them on the doorstep and stood

shading her eyes, looking at her naked babies.

"John, Betsy," she called, "don't you make for to drown yourselves, my dears."

"You're a strange creature," said Martha, when Sarah came in again. "Taking these fancies about Mr. Pin and my lady."

"You're strange too, my dear, never to have been in love in your life."

"I have once," said Martha. "Poor daft soul, he got runned over. I liked him enough to marry him, poor feckless body: seems a long time ago."

Sarah sighed. "That's church love, my dear, and a bob to the squire, and a penny a week to a burial club. True love is wild-like —like I don't know, like bluebells and storms and hills and such. Never could respect a man who hadn't struck me once. I wouldn't live another way than what way I have, not for nothing nor nobody. Look at them angels drinking their milk, look at their jammy mouths. I'd rather have them than a coach and four or the Crown jewels."

"You do talk strange," said Martha. "I

don't know if I ought to listen, being church."

"My dear," Sarah answered, "you are a good woman, and when the blow falls you'll be a help."

"There isn't going to be no blow."

"Gipsies know, my dear. I've heard my mother tell what her brother was doing when he was hundreds of miles away. I've no book learning, people's my books."

She got up suddenly, quite suddenly for one so quiet, and kissed Martha. "I'm terrible lonely sometimes," she said, "and then I think of your pretty lady and you, my dear, and I think they are stupid and sweet and wholesome and all like spring flowers, and it comforts me. And some nights I looks at them two angels asleep and I say to myself, there's the world in front of them, and, oh, God, it's a cruel world."

She stood with her back to Martha looking seawards, a fine, handsome woman, foreign as the island English say when they can't quite understand things. "I'm thirty-six, Martha, and it's a great age, but I was

very old when I was twelve, and I'm as young as those two children and I don't understand. I looks at life sometimes and I says, my breasts are firm and my hips are firm, and I can haul with any man on the beach, but there's something inside me, Martha, which is fierce yet and not burned out yet, and you won't understand, and the words sound queer to me, but I'm angrily happy and that's it."

"But you've settled down, Sarah, and got this dinky little cottage and the children and all you want," Martha expostulated.

"Them as is like me never settle down, my dear. There's a time comes down the wind, as my mother used to say, and when I hear it I shall follow wherever it leads to, only this time I shall take the children with me. I can see my old mother now with pipe in her mouth making baskets by the roadside, with father in the woods seeing if there were any rabbits in the snares he had set. Poor father, he died before they could hang him."

She relapsed into a long silence, while Martha went on with the sewing she had

brought. After a while Sarah rose and filled a glass with water, set it on the table and looked deeply into it. "There's trouble coming," she said at last. "I can see it in the water. It tells me that. I can see your lady in it, and somehow I feel I'm in it too."

She went to the doorway and poured the water from the glass in a way which seemed to be part of some ancient rite. "Trouble's a tease," she said. Then the mother smile lit her face. "Come you in, my angels," she called, "and get your clothes on."

IV

Henry was the first to see Pin's note on the table when they returned. He opened it, read it, whistled, and then read it aloud.

"Listen to this," said Henry. "It's just like him, the harum-scarum fellow. 'Dear people, I remembered something this morning that I had forgotten for years. It is a debt, and I am walking about three hundred miles to pay it. My love to all of you. The bad penny is sure to turn up again.' "

"Pin gone?" said Rose in dismay.

"Looks like it," said Henry. "Very thoughtless of him at this time of year."

"I rather believe in Pin's inspirations," Lady Angelina said, looking at Rose's white face.

"I am going to change my dress," said Rose, hurriedly leaving the room.

There was the sprig of forget-me-nots, and she took it with trembling fingers and held it to her lips.

CHAPTER XVI

AND SO HOME

I

ITH the lightest of hearts Pin set out to walk from Devon to Lincolnshire. His adventures would make a book in themselves: the inns he stayed at, the flirtations he had, the queer characters from duke to tinker he met, the children he comforted, and the cats he stroked are all weaved into the intricate tapestry of his life. A bed in an apple-loft, in a bacon-chamber, in a hedge, in great stately rooms ghostly with historic memories. These were part and parcel of this five weeks' excursion. He made a guinea and spent a penny; he borrowed a penny and got a guinea's worth out of it, to wit a piece of bread. He was to be seen at cock fights, fairs, tavern brawls, the dinner tables of lords and ladies, the supper

tables of sluts and farmers. He rode on coaches, wagons, carrier-carts, and once on a donkey. Churches and public houses gave him pause; rain and a love of beauty drove him into churches. He gained the affection of an old rector by standing motionless for a quarter of an hour before an east window. "You admire it?" the rector asked. "Admire it?" cried Pin; "it is part of me now. One cannot admire things like that; they absorb you." At an inn, if he had money, he was the host; if not, he was certain to be the guest.

In this manner he came to the Fen country —that good place where every town boasts a church as beautiful as a cathedral. His heart was gay within him at the sight of the long roads and the dykes, the vast expanse of sky, at the sight of golden plover dancing their ballets overhead, at the singing wings of the wild geese, the lonely heron. Here, indeed, was Georgian England: old market squares, the fine solid houses of the country gentlemen, the great wrought iron gates which brought back memories of the forge and Henry and Rose.

He came to his own native town and stood a while in the market place, nearly deserted, as the hour was one, and the quiet world was eating. Over four years! He could almost have sworn that the shadows had not altered. The old names were over the shops. He could not remember that there had ever been names other than those over the shops. Hornchurch's, the pork-pie shop; Wenderby's, the saddlers; Dimston, the grocers—Dimston with sixteen children. There they would be behind those curtained windows over the shop, seated at table.

The place always had the same effect on Pin. It seemed so stationary, so remote from the rest of the world. The river which ran through it idled its way to the sea; the same rooks surely built year after year in the elms of the church; the same old man would be fishing from the bridge. Curiosity took him to the bridge to find out, and there was old Parker fishing. "Any luck, Mr. Parker?" said Pin.

"Much as usual, sir."

That was it; it was all "much as usual,"

all except himself, the tramp, the adventurer.

He wondered if he ought to have warned his father of his return, and as he thought so a boy passed—the gardener's boy.

"Philip," he called.

"Why, it's Mr. Pin," the boy answered.

"It's Mr. Pin right enough," he replied. "Tell Mr. Willoughby, no, tell Mrs. Golden that I shall be in to dinner at three o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

"Everybody all right at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anything happened in the last few years?"

The boy thought for a moment and then said, "Mother cut her finger very bad last week, sir."

"Sorry to hear that," said Pin, smiling. "Now run off."

Everything was so comfortable; the sun was so comfortable, the houses, the river; the trees were so comfortable. Rooks cawed. An old woman came out of the "White Horse" and threw some dish water into the road; he knew her. "She must be

nearly ninety!" he said aloud. Good lord, what a place!

The place had a beauty, but, alas, almost the horror of silent decay. There was a sense as if it were dead and buried in trees, as if even the last trump would never wake it, as if the pair of cooing pigeons which fluttered noisily on to the bridge were denizens of another world.

A hunger for some breath of life, for the company of human beings, came to Pin, and he went into the "White Horse" and called in the tap-room for a pint of ale. Two silent carters were there eating hunks of bread and bacon and drinking four-ale, and a very old shepherd sat in a corner asleep.

In the calm, as Pin sat on the window-seat, came the sound of the passing bell. It woke the shepherd. Pin was counting the strokes; he knew the shepherd was. The bell tolled the sex first, a woman, then the age. It tolled on, sending its melancholy message into the sun-warm air: eighty-seven, eighty-eight, right on to ninety.

"That's old Missus Pundle," said the shep-

herd. "She's been a mort of a time dying. Poor soul! All flesh is grass, and a vixen she was. However, there's room in heaven for all sorts. I'm seventy-six myself, and hale yet except for this eye, which I spoiled cutting barley."

"Allgive, aren't you?" Pin asked.

"Gaffer Allgive, that's me, sir," said the shepherd, touching forelock. "You'll be Mr. Willoughby, sir."

"I am," said Pin.

"I knew you, sir, when you was a very young gentleman, sir; very young indeed. Seems yesterday. Here to-day and gone to-morrow, sir. The old gentleman, sir, be prone. I was counting the bell for him."

"For my father?"

"You know, sir, don't you?"

"Doctor and parson to the house now," said one of the carters.

Pin put down half a crown, called to the old landlady, and said, "Ask them what they'd like," and left the inn. Three pints were solemnly ordered, and Life and Death went on.

II

It was not until Pin was in the road and walking quickly home that he realised the blow which had fallen upon him. Somehow, he never thought of his father except from the point of view of life; death had not entered into his calculations.

Would it, he wondered, be more decent if he were not to intrude upon the scene at the last solemn moments—he, the wastrel; but his heart-strings led him home down the tree-bordered road, past the Illfords' house, past the big Elizabethan house with its world-renowned chimney stacks and great yew hedge, and so to the garden entrance to his house, the Manor.

At the garden door he paused, his hand on the latch. The four years since he had opened it seemed four centuries. He opened it, and the four centuries were four minutes. Nothing was altered. There were the hives, the raspberry canes, the herb bed, even the outside meat-safe being on the same old twisted wire, the old red brick walls on

which grew toadflax, and wallflower gave out the scent of sun and age and quietude. A peacock butterfly flattened itself against the wall and soaked in sun. Pin trembled as his childhood came singing back. Sight, sound, smell in a flash sent him into sailor suits again.

He passed through the archway into the main garden, saw the long beautiful herbaceous borders, the rose garden on the far side, the great cedars and acacias shading the lower lawn. Trim and velvet as ever was the sunken bowling green without weed or daisy to mar its perfection. There were the garden tables and iron chairs with spring seats; there was the cockatoo on his perch gleaming white in the sun. No age had touched this place since he had left it, but now Death was in the house to put an end to all this serene peace.

Mrs. Golden came down the steps and on to the garden path, made her bob, and held her finger to her lips.

"Just in time, sir; only just in time. The master knows and wants to see you at once.

He's quite clear now, Master Pin; but it is very near the end."

"Any pain?"

"Not now, not now," she answered, biting her lip. Pin could see her eyes were swollen with crying. "Pardon the liberty, Master Pin," the old woman said; "but he has forgiven. He has made his peace with the Lord most beautiful. The maids is preparing a little dinner, sir; but you'll go upstairs now, won't you?"

He went up the beautiful oak staircase with its low treads and carved banisters, walked softly along the corridor until he came to the door of his father's room. With a beating heart he entered.

His father was propped up in bed, his face as white as the pillows but shining with a spiritual exaltation. There was, as always, a smell of cedar wood in the room.

Pin went to the bedside, a feeling of great awe upon him. Here was a man seeing something mortal man could not look upon. Then his father moved his right hand towards him.

"My dear boy," he said, "my very dear boy, your mother and you stand beside me now, and the way is no longer dark. All I have is yours. Do not let the place and the things in it be a weight round your neck. Possessions are nothing; love is everything. Love is God, and God is love. Forgive me for my lack of understanding. I know now that God makes the wandering spirit for his own purposes. Are you there still?"

"Yes, father."

"Something told me you would come to me. Hold my hand a little tighter. Have you friends?"

"Yes, father."

"A wife?"

"No, father."

"Women are very wonderful, my dear; very. Has the sun gone in?"

"No, father."

There came a silence of five or six minutes, then Mr. Willoughby spoke, whispered, "I trust in the Lord." That was all. His hand relaxed its pressure, his eyes grew dim; he smiled and died.

The grandfather clock whined and struck three.

III

The next two hours passed like a dream. The doctor, a strange clergyman, and old Mr. Fertile, his father's solicitor, spoke to him, and he replied like a man in a trance. By five o'clock he was seated in his father's chair in the study with the doctor holding a glass full of something to him and bidding him drink it in a sharp voice.

"I want to be left alone, please," said Pin, after taking the draught.

"I brought you into the world, my lad," said the old doctor, gently.

"You didn't do it a very good turn, doctor," said Pin, with a spark of his usual self.

"You are to go into the dining-room and eat a bite of something now, and no one will bother you. He's had no pain this week, and that's a comfort to you, and he spoke of you as his dearest treasure. I loved him myself, my lad, and I feel this deeply."

"You are very kind."

"Now get some food inside you and don't worry about arrangements; Fertile and I have planned everything. You'll need black, so Bantridge will call at six. Best to get these things over."

The study was eloquent of Pin's father. The array of books, manuscripts, boxes of cigars in disorder, the smell of leather and tobacco—a potpourri. All seemed to have absorbed in some way the essence of the late Mr. Willoughby. Pin sat there after the doctor had gone, soaked in memories. He sat motionless until Mrs. Golden came timidly in; but when she saw him so broken, so white, the mother in her overcame the housekeeper. "My lamb," she said, "I've got a nice piece of cold salmon for you, and a tiny bit of chicken; come and eat a little, do now. I know how you feel. I'm all broke up myself, but starving don't help sorrow, my dear."

He looked up into the kind old face, and the first tears welled up into his eyes. "Good old Golden," he said, gripping her hand.

"I'll come, but, dear, you must leave me alone."

Alone, utterly alone with the patchwork pageant of his life trailing across his mind. Sun, wind, rippling water, tap-room company, women, song, laughter; and now this ordered house, cook, maids, stables, land, house, silver, pictures—a cage.

"I won't be caged," he said to himself, and began to pace the dining-room. He knew the life expected of him; a seat on the bench of magistrates, opening bazaars, taking the chair at Fen drainage meetings, sitting on committees. No, a thousand times no. The dear dead upstairs had loved the placid life of a country gentleman, with his books and prints and flowers, his good cellar and his pew in church.

He knew about the extent of his father's income—some five or six thousand a year—and he preferred his odd guinea and rare ten pounds and frequent penny far better if they meant freedom. As well give a skylark a jewelled cage and argue that one saw heaven better through golden bars; as well tell a

tiger in the zoo that it was nice to be secure and see so many people.

"You will never die in a bed," had been a warning held up to him by his first tutor, who little knew that Pin preferred a ditch.

His learning was from tattered books, and his wisdom from travellers. His first editions were the spring flowers, and his talk ranged the world. Yet this very dining-room was considered perfect; pure Queen Anne, all of it—pictures, furniture, silver. It had a repose which almost drove him mad.

He thought of Rose, adorable, comely, like a blossom with dew on it. He thought of Henry, good, strong, who did not realise what a treasure he had; and he thought of his father dead upstairs, and wondered if he had ever known temptation.

All through that night he suffered the agony of indecision. He wanted to be true to his father and he wanted to be true to himself. He remembered how, some years before, he found himself outside a bird shop with twenty pounds in his pocket, and he remembered how he had bought nineteen

pounds' worth of birds and set them all free. The shopman had said, "Well, sir, that's one way of killing them; most of them were born in captivity, and, with the cats about, they may last the week."

And here was he, born in captivity with a beautiful cage, but—but with the power to open the door.

They found him next morning asleep, wet with dew, under one of the big acacia trees.

His mind was made up.

Rose won the day. Pin never questioned the morality of his decision; he merely laid the matter in front of his emotions. He never felt in the least like a man about to do an unjustifiable act in stealing a man's wife from him; but he looked at the matter from the point of view of Nature, mate calling to mate. The world was wide; it would receive them. He would show her the world. Glowing trumpets of African lilies, the wonder of orange groves, or the mountain crocus and the purple bells of soldanella growing in the snow; the thousand flowers of Italy, star-strewn nights in Spain: these would be his

wedding presents to the woman of his choice.

. . M . . .

The funeral over, it was Pin's melancholy business to sort out his father's papers and to destroy all that were the mere litter of years. Nothing touched him so much as to find that all his schoolboy letters had been kept; it argued a part of his father's heart he had never explored. Among other things, he found a book of manuscript poems written by his father to his mother with a note in his fine handwriting inside. "Better not show these to M.; too sentimental!"

The problem of the house worried him. It weighed on him to think that he owned a house—a tent or a caravan were in his line—and when walking one day down one of the long, straight Fen country roads, he almost came to the conclusion that he would give it to the town.

He entered a little inn, "The Farmer and Flock," outside the village of Hincleworth Saint George, and, after asking the landlord

for beer and bread and cheese, he turned his attention to the only other occupant of the bar parlour—a young man occupied in making notes in a book. He was of the fair type, with blue eyes and a tanned face, a handsome, open face, not over well-dressed, and with a knapsack on the bench by his side. By one of those coincidences of which life is so full, the young man turned to Pin and asked him if he was a native of these parts; and, hearing that he was, asked if he knew where a certain Mr. Willoughby lived.

"I am Mr. Willoughby," Pin answered.

"But they told me he was an old gentleman," said the stranger.

"He was an old gentleman, but he is dead."

Then the stranger noticed Pin's black clothes, flushed deeply, and said, "I beg your pardon; I am so sorry. I bear a letter of introduction to him."

"Let it carry on to the next generation," said Pin, holding out his hand.

"My name," said the stranger, fumbling in his pocket, "is Arthur Friend. My tutor —I have just left Oxford (Oriel)—gave me

a letter to your father. They were at Balliol together. He knew Mr. Willoughby lived somewhere in Lincolnshire, but had forgotten where; except on the matter of domestic life in the Middle Ages he was a little vague. Here is the letter."

Pin opened it, looked at it, smiled, and said, "I am afraid it conveys very little to me; it is written in Greek."

Friend roared with laughter, in which Pin joined. "So like old Binstead," said Friend. "May I see?"

Pin handed him the letter, and fell to his bread and cheese, which the landlord had just put before him.

"It amounts to this," said Friend. "I am writing a history of the county, and I had heard that Mr. Willoughby had the finest library on the subject, and I was anxious to look at it. The letter, which is, as you see, four pages long, has one paragraph to that effect; the remainder is a request for any notes on fourteenth-century agricultural implements Mr. Willoughby might have."

In a flash the idea came. "Mr. Friend,"

said Pin, "I suppose what you would most like would be to live in that library by the hour, by the week, by the year?"

"Those things don't happen," Friend answered, shaking his head.

"I am looking for a secretary," said Pin, "a man who would live in my house, look after my interests, and write a book about the Fen country, and also arrange that it shall be beautifully illustrated. There!"

"Too good to be true," said Friend.

"Here," cried Pin, taking the letter in his hand, "are my secretary's credentials. The salary is five hundred pounds a year. The history will be dedicated to my father. Come along; we must open a bottle of Madeira and send for my solicitor."

"You surely don't mean this!"

"My dear guide, philosopher, and friend," said Pin, "I shall boast of possessing a secretary who has an intimate knowledge of the Greek tongue. It will not take us more than half an hour to walk home."

The young man gazed before him, his face grown very serious. "I don't know what to

say," he said. "It is like one's most cherished dream come true."

"Give me your hand and we will seal the bargain, and old Fertile shall place the law of the business in order. I'm going abroad."

"Where to?" asked Friend, smiling.

"Heaven, I think," said Pin.

CHAPTER XVII

A LOVER RIDES BY NIGHT

THREE weeks later Pin rode from home as gaily as any questing knight.

It is not easy to know if a man with a banking account, an estate in the country, a solicitor and a secretary, can be called an adventurer, but in this case Pin must be so called, for adventurer he was. Men not knowing him would call him a cad and a despoiler of homes, but knowing him even the most unimaginative invented excuses; he had, as women say, a way with him.

Seated on his black horse he was a figure out of his age, looking more Spanish than English, more of the fifteenth century than mid-Victorian. Dressed in black, with a black stock, a soft black hat, and a cloak about his shoulders, there was, but for the

scarlet of his mouth, and the silver of his whip handle, no touch of colour about him: a grandee with a caressing smile.

Women had to look at him, and men admired his manner of being part and parcel of his horse, and children frankly adored him, and yet in plain, cold, blunt truth, he was a robber setting out to rob without a pang.

That ardent young scholar, Mr. Friend, fell completely under his charm, when Pin carelessly threw the whole burden of his responsibilities on him. The budding historian became factotum at the stroke of a pen. Pin held Mrs. Golden's hand while he announced the position, which flattered her so much that she started mothering Mr. Friend from that moment.

The strict and doubtless right people would denounce Pin as a villain; the philosopher would sum him up as being of interest, but better out of the world than in it; but there is something to be said for a man who carries the sun in his pocket, and lets everybody look at it for nothing.

He rode by night, as the days were hot. In the daytime, after a midday meal, he slept, with admirable condescension, in anybody's park or woods, and the number of lodge-keepers' daughters he kissed has not been calculated.

In a sense England became his background, her travelling body of bear-wards, puppet showmen, organ grinders, scissors-to-grind men, old soldiers and men with maps to sell, and unfrocked clergy not above stealing a chicken or milking a cow on the quiet, were part of the texture of his tapestry.

And there, little dreaming of this picturesqueness and flaunt, were Rose and Henry, Martha and Lady Angelina, in as ordinary a nest as ever gave shelter to church-going citizens.

What else your dullard may say, all men's roads lead to a woman. Turnpike road, field path, city pavement, all echo the footsteps of extravagant lovers.

Your fish-like man reads Byron by night, and quotes Kant by day. A man's oath

should be as hearty as his laugh, and the wry smile of the cynic sours his lips and decent folks' eyesight because there has been no woman to kiss the corners of his lips into human guise.

England by day is a wonderful enough place, a garden desecrated by cities, but by night, with stars awake and birds stirring in their sleep in the trees, and the poet's candle alight in upper windows, and flowers free to breathe, and brooks with time to learn new songs, romance holds sway and Love the Conqueror polishes up his arrows with moonbeams.

So Pin rode by night, and his black horse went clickety-clock over cobble stones in fast-asleep towns, and the black vision of Pin, with his cloak about him, rode through huddled villages, and set up a silhouette against star-powdered skies. The two, horse and man, smelt the dawn, and welcomed the dew, and hailed those busy-body ghosts, the owls, and heard that fatal rustle of stoat and weasel, and the cry of trapped hares.

The man's actual mind was a sheet of flame. Rose, all dewy, all soft, sat in his heart like a pool of water in an endless desert. There was but one thing in this world worth attaining, this creature, this creamy delicious woman. Henry, during this ride, did not exist. If man only once sees as far as heaven, why should he look at the ground?

And what did Rose think? One might hate Pin, one might despise him, but one could not ignore him. Pin was in her blood, Pin and not Henry was her experience of life; emotions had to be referred to him; tender grey mornings, shafts of light, orange-coloured skies; children with bruised knees, who cried with a kind of luxury, all brought him back to Rose. She would have had Pin stoned out of a village by day as a magician, and by night have stolen out to bind his wounds.

But in life security is a great thing, and Pin was not secure, he was no more secure than the scent of primroses, which becomes only a memory in the summer.

She had a moral sense and was ashamed

at the violence of her thoughts, but if white holds hands with scarlet and a bird sings, will both be pink?

People, men and women, have the habit of saying: "I am different from other people," which is only the kind of armour you can buy for a penny. When one knows that in some places orchids are just as common as daisies, one wonders why there are no daisy hunters; the same thing occurs in the emotions.

Truly during this ride Pin felt as if he were the only person in England; the rest, excepting Rose, were pigmies. The night scents intoxicated him, honeysuckle, the smell of warm grass, woodland odours, pines, the aroma of gorse clung to his senses.

> "There is a thing the poet sees,
> The cynic always misses;
> The world is not all bread and cheese,
> But bread, and cheese, and kisses."

So he sang as he rode, and once an old couple heard him, as they sat by their cottage door in the cool of the summer night, and as they were an old and a loving couple

they understood. And when he gave them "good night" the old man replied with his benediction: "God go with you, sir," as one king might salute another in passing.

In this manner he came at last to Dorset with its lush meadows and heaths and dairy farms, and downs where fat sheep crunched the sweet grass, and one evening he came to the top of a hill and saw the sea all pearl-coloured in the end of the sunset with no edge against the sky, but only a blue-grey mystery.

Of plans he had none, poets do not make plans, but seize upon occasion. He was sure of her, but knew that he must leave everything until the moment the genius of love should point out; then Life, life like the pearl-coloured sea spread before him, life with no edge against the sky, but fading in a wondrous mystery. Even as he looked the sea changed, and there lay the deep marvellous blue, the colour of Romance. He dropped the reins, and held out his arms to the sea as if to embrace it.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FAIR

N red-earthed Devon all the folk were going to the Fair of the South. There was a cattle show, a flower show, wrestling, roundabouts, everything, with, on the last two days of a hectic week, steeplechases.

The roads to Byrlescombe were crammed, perspiring women wheeled calm, peacefully sleeping babies, wheeled astonished babies, wheeled yelling babies; every public house from the "King's Arms" to the "Pure Drop," was crowded, teetotallers drank port and cider, as was their custom. Farmers with wives and daughters, already crimson with heat, beer and excitement, drove every kind of vehicle. Men with boxes strapped to their backs plodded along, well knowing that chil-

dren of all ages wondered if these same boxes contained white mice, or marionettes, or conjuring tricks, or those amazing sealed envelopes which contained your fortune for a penny, not only that, but recipes against every known disease, from backache to heartache. There was not a man, woman, or child but hugged secret savings for fairings.

There were those who carried their own jugs against the time when they should reach the leg-of-beef shop where you could get this savoury stew at three ha'pence a pint if you carried it away. There were parties of songful sailors marching behind other sailors who had obviously not learnt the violin, but whose faces were grim in the effort. There were bagmen, and quacks, and painless dentists, crockery merchants, tumblers, benders, stallions, hogs, utterly dazed sheep, post chaises with postilions, and, as Pin gathered, a grim vehicle, the only one driving the other way to Exeter, in which a murderer was being conveyed to keep an engagement with the hangman.

All the fun of the fair, as the saying is, crowded into narrow, hot lanes, clogging the highway and impudently streaming over fields.

The number of dogs was stupendous, well-bred, aloof sheep dogs, mongrels, fat carriage dogs, and every kind of sporting dog imaginable, and every dog had, it appeared, agreed to bark together.

It suited Pin to be the great gentleman that day; he charmed the good lady at the "King's Arms" into allowing him to have the best bedroom, and a table in the bow window all to himself, though she never knew how he did it, or why she did it. He dined mid-day solitary, drank champagne, and was the object of the inquisitive regard of everybody in the room: the county under its eyebrows looked and wondered if he were some foreign potentate, which he was, Prince in the Kingdom of Love.

He sat long after the coffee-room was emptied, and the neat country maids had cleared away, and watched the eager crowds below in the market place.

It was a wonderful feeling to Pin to sit there alone, well dressed, with gold in his pocket, cool, calm, removed from vagabondage, and see the sweating, seething country folk going from booth to booth, gazing open-mouthed at the clowns on stilts, scattering as the coach drove through, crowding together again when some loud-voiced pedlar bawled his wares.

There was the man in a fur coat, despite the heat, who sold mysterious packets for three-pence, one packet of which was alleged to contain a gold watch, double repeater, brand new, an exact copy, so said, of one owned by the Prince of Wales. There was the top-hatted medicine man with his ointment, procured, at the risk of his life, from Laughing Bear, the Red Indian chief. In gaily painted booths were sword swallowers, fat women, Circassian beauties, strong men, every kind of monstrosity, from bearded ladies to darkly hinted ladies of aristocratic blood whom misfortune had given fins in place of arms.

Somewhere in this noisy crowd Rose

would be walking sweet and calm as jasmine on a summer's evening.

A sign caught Pin's eyes; the Brylescombe Society of Antiquarians were holding an Exhibition in the Town Hall opposite, and it tickled his fancy to go and see what refuse of the ages they had gathered together. Without more ado he picked up his hat, left the inn, and made his way to the building. At the door he obtained a catalogue for sixpence and there, in the nearly deserted room, found food for laughter.

No. 20. Mr. Waplode.
Oyster shell, encrusted with lime deposited from hard water boiled in a tea kettle.
22, 23. Two curious potatoes.
T. Adams, Sen.
49. Map of the human ear.
50. A child at prayer. Water colours assisted by Miss Adams.
Mrs. Buffham.
62. George II. . . . on glass.
63. Anne on ditto.

It amused Pin; all that swaying crowd outside, and here this little backwater of

lovingly cherished garbage made a strange contrast. There was a girl standing by one of the cases, a forlorn figure in an ill-made cotton dress, yet pretty, of the wistful order, and with a hint of Rose about her which moved Pin. He sensed that she was in some kind of distress, and made his way towards her while still looking at the exhibits.

Mrs. Dandy.
No. 110. Moses unveiled. 1626.
Mr. Ball.
187. Whale harpoon.
188. Large tooth.
189. Steam engine indicator.

How lovely she looked, and how pretty nearer to.

P. Everad, Esq.
No. 213. Part of horse's tooth.
214. Part of cow's tooth.
215. Petrified basket of eggs from Matlock Spa.

She looked like a bird, wild and frightened, not knowing whether to move or fly. She

was a living appeal. She ought to have been at home with the ducks and chickens.

Mrs. Fawn.
No. 278. View of church (ruined) by moonlight.
Mr. Sharp.
478. Stomach of a monkey, inflated.
479. Skeleton of a cat.

He was quite close now.

T. Wilkinson, Esq.
No. 625. Dog in needlework.
Mr. Jas. Clarke.
646. Adder, in spirits.
647. Centipede, in ditto.

"You mustn't cry," said Pin. "Sit down on this seat. Those old people are asleep. Tell me all about it."

The girl sat down, obedient to the delicious voice, the captivating smile. Eighteen, not more, so he guessed. Her shoes were covered with dust which had also soiled her white cotton stockings: a wild rose, no garden affair.

The little pathetic story helped by a

crumpled handkerchief and tears. She cried prettily.

"Father said I wasn't to come, but I came and he's here, so I'm hiding, and Sally's gone off with young Mr. Starling, and somebody has stolen my purse, please, sir."

"So you have had no dinner," said Pin.

"I had three cakes," she answered, "and then I found I couldn't pay and they was terrible about it, and there was a pack of folk there and they laughed. What will I do, please, sir?"

A country flirt perhaps with a little bit more story of life than showed in those clear eyes which looked like love-in-a-mist. A mother for children, though a child herself.

"They being whom?" asked Pin.

"Sheleberes, the bun shop," said she.

"Then, Phoebe, we will pay for those cakes and be terrible ourselves."

"My name's Jill," she said, smiling at this wonderful stranger.

"Very well, Jill, mine is Jack. Now, the vengeance of the gods on Sheleberes."

So the prince of the royal blood of good

English roads armed a princess of the royal blood of English lanes, and they obliterated Mr. Shelebere and Mrs. Shelebere and all the young of Sheleberes with five shillings, flung, not placed, on the counter.

A roving eye is a roving eye, and what with that and a damsel in distress, what more do you want? The poise of the great gentleman went by the board; dignity has no place on the swings and roundabouts. Cream and kisses, apple tart and junket, youth, a sudden face to face with Jill's father made as good a little drama as you want.

Fortunately, Jill's father had become acquainted with a beverage made of perry and brandy, and they met while that kindly influence was at its most benign mood.

"Dang it, if it isn't my li'l lass," said the farmer.

"We have been searching for you everywhere," said Pin.

"I been in the 'Wheatsheaf,' I been in the 'George,' I been in the 'Hay Wain,' and a most o' places," the farmer replied. "And I been also up along to 'King's Arms,' and the

'Three Gardeners,' and one or two other places I can't call to mind. You can't have looked far. Who be you?"

Pin invented rapidly. "My sister is looking for a dairy-maid," he said, "and this was a convenient day——"

"Oh, quality," said the farmer. "I ask your pardon, sir."

"I have been unable to find my sister as yet," said Pin in his most lordly manner. "So if you will pardon me we will continue the search, but seeing that it is a warm evening, I trust you will take some refreshment with me; your daughter would, no doubt, care for a glass of cider."

Friendly relations were restored, as they say in diplomatic circles, over a bottle of sherry white wine, during which the farmer passed into a peaceful sleep.

The young sickle moon found two people talking eternities, but in a perfectly proper manner, that is to say if you take an innocent kiss or two, maybe more, as part of a fair day.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RACES

ESTRAINT was not Pin's greatest virtue, but in this case his sense of drama prompted him to withhold from a commonplace meeting with Rose. He had seen both Rose and Henry several times, and had avoided them. He had no wish to meet his destiny coming out of drapers laden with parcels, or to plunge at her through a crowd of Henry's friends.

It was amusement enough for Pin to sit at his window and watch the crowd, or occasionally to mix with it and listen to the soft Devon burr grow to shrill excitement over a dancing bear, or the heated race of the local band trying to get over a waltz by Weber in record time.

On the Thursday—the day before the races—Pin had a party exactly suited to his

mood. He had got to know the showman and the freaks. It cost him about six "goes" of brandy and water per showman, the word "water," perhaps, being an exaggeration; and his charm of manner to make friends with the freaks.

At the "Pure Drop," just outside the town, the merriest party sat down to cold supper at midnight. The contortionist, or bender, and the bearded lady, who had been engaged for many years, and had four children on the strength of it, were the life and soul of the party. Owing to the heat of the evening the lady removed her beard at an early stage, thereby disclosing a pretty face full of humour. The learned professor, who owned the calculating pig, dropped his foreign accent, which he frequently did during the performance. "Mesdames and moonsews," he would say, "I 'ave come to ze England wiz ze clevaire pigs . . . stand away from the door, you boys; if you can't afford a penny, don't sneak a look."

The tattooed lady, who showed more back than was then usual in society, had washed

off the tattoo for the occasion and exhibited a bruise or so caused by the dwarf, it was said, in what appeared to be a friendly fit of temper or a mere incident of married life.

The conversation of these people would have brought a blush to the cheek of a bronze statue, but their honesty and good comradeship would have made many a missionary of the best kind blush and forgive the rest.

Not one of them were in the least unhappy with Pin. That subtle sense of the road made them know he was one of them in spirit, and the cheers that followed his speech might well have woken the Dartmoor shepherds.

When the company broke up and strayed homewards at four o'clock in the morning, Pin, who was about to leave also, found that two weary girls had sat up because the plates and dishes had to be washed up against the work of the next day. So Pin must needs stay and help to wash up, and earn the eternal gratitude of the maids, insisting on their having cold chicken and cider, and giving them each a kiss and half a crown, which

caused them on the next day to be very haughty with their young men. And neither of them was in the least pretty.

He went back to the "King's Arms," and slept for an hour. Then, having washed and shaved, he went down to the stables and saddled his horse.

There was a light on the moor, which was a faint purple; the heather, lit by a rose-tinted sky, which lent a warm glow to the great grey Bredon Ridge and threw a violet shadow from Neek Tor on the close-cropped grass.

Horse and man were completely in the picture, ages old, like the grim Tors and the carpet of heather, not individual in that morning light but just horse and man.

On the far side of the pack horse bridge, across the Griddle, Pin drew rein. He had some apples in his pocket, and gave one to his horse, teasing him by holding it away—now here, now there, until the soft velvet nose was pushed against his face in protest. Women, children, dogs, horses—all won by this man who could not win himself.

The sun rose, and the morning mist removed itself delicately. A water-wagtail took his bath in the river spray, walking with swift steps from stone to stone.

A silence, like a prayer, held the place so that the Nature noises melted into it, as Pin melted into it. He did not think. He was of Nature, gathered into her as much as the heather on the hills. He was, as the vulgar say, praising when they mean to curse, a clod.

An hour later he met her by accident, as he would have wished it, dramatically. He sat his horse in the market place, a little girl of six or seven perched proudly in front of him, high above the crowd, frightened happily. And she, Rose, came alone down Market Street and saw him there with his triumphant face, for he was exquisitely happy. Their eyes met. He kissed the child and set her down with a shilling in her hand, and leaping from his horse, held out both his hands and said in a voice ringing with emotion, "Rose."

The great fear that swept over her made

her face go white; but she was very still.

How long it was before she spoke neither of them knew. With his arm through the reins, they walked in silence until, nearly out of the town, she in one sentence spoke all that was the burden of her troubled mind. "This is wrong," and turned to him a face lit with adoration.

He knew better than to break the spell with words, the morning on the moor had taught him that. They walked in silence as if they were walking to the ends of the earth, with no provision for the morrow. If the Angel of Death had come to meet them then they would have been happy.

She spoke. "Henry?" whispered not to Pin, but to herself.

"It is ordained," said Pin.

"I would like to be very good," she answered, never looking at him.

"You are."

"Pin," she said slowly, "I am yours; that, you know, so that I can ask you to let me be good."

Something—a wave of the tenderness

which was at the fount of his nature, perhaps—filled his eyes with tears. "I will go away."

"No." It was a cry.

"Rose."

She flew swiftly for the armour of the commonplace. "I must go to the races. I promised Henry. You must give me time, please; oh, please. Look, we are near the course. Take me to Henry. He said he would be there early. He's a steward, or whatever they call them."

"Rose."

"Pin," she said, turning quickly, "I'm going to be good."

They walked in silence towards the town, stopped in front of the Royal Hotel. "We are staying here," she said. "We may see you on the grand stand."

He bowed stiffly and left her.

. . . . . .

It made Pin suddenly cold to meet Henry almost directly afterwards, to feel that handgrip, to see the real affection in his honest face; but the world is a place of perspectives,

and the image of Rose blotted out the clear view of other people.

Henry, always a child, wore an alarming suit, with a tie of dazzling hue and a white top-hat; but, somehow, his size and his leonine appearance carried them off. The meeting might have been between a Frenchman's idea of an Englishman and an Englishman's picture of a hidalgo.

"Pin, good old Pin, this is splendid, and Rose will be delighted. She's very fond of you, my dear fellow; and so are we all."

Pin winced at this, but said, "I've just seen Rose."

"I have just noticed you are in black," said Henry. "My dear fellow, I'm sorry."

"My father."

"I am very sorry."

"It was quite happy really," Pin answered. "And I have been placed out of reach of want for good and all."

"Shall you come to the races this afternoon?" Henry asked.

"Of course I shall," said Pin. "My sorrow is too deep to have any sham about it.

I am coming to the races. I am going to back a horse called Blackbird because he's like me, and I'm going to enjoy myself."

"Same old chap," said Henry. "I don't think a pint of ale would do us any harm, do you? You'll be able to look after Rose. I am on one of the jumps, the best one; it's a right-angle water jump that will take some doing."

Over their ale Henry waxed eloquent. He had taken the craftsman's prize with one of his gates. "Our gate, Pin; so you share in it." And Rose had a second prize for fat chickens. "So we see everything through Rose-coloured spectacles," said Henry, laughing loudly at his own joke. "You will have dinner with Rose and bring her along early. I am dining with the clerk of the course. Lord Dunfield is coming, and the mayor, and the sheriffs, and half the county —all the big wigs. And me a blacksmith's son! What fun!"

"You make a very good public character, Henry," said Pin. "That is because you frankly enjoy it."

"I do," he answered honestly. "When I stood there next to the mayor helping to give away the prizes, my heart was almost too large for my body."

"You are a large boy, I believe," said Pin, smiling. "And I believe, too, you wished the mayor would ask to feel your biceps."

For a moment Henry was silent. He had gone quite red in the face. "Odd how you know, Pin; I asked him to."

And how did Pin excuse himself for what he was about to do? By a thought given to him by the fair. One took calves away from their mothers, kittens from cats, dogs from familiar hearths, and everybody recovered. Not one fraction of the spiritual sense of what he was going to do occurred to him; he was purblind to the inner realities of that moment.

Pin took Rose to a light meal at his inn. Their conversation was fragmentary and artificial; it dealt mostly with the reason of Lady Angelina's absence.

Rose told of her talk while they were trying to persuade her to come.

"Now once and for all," Lady Angelina had said, "it is a long way, and very hot and dusty; bear that in mind. Then I've seen all the fat cattle I ever want to see, and the fatter they are the more I dislike them. I hate prosperity; it is so obvious. As for the clowns and their jokes, I laughed at them forty years ago; and I don't want to be reminded of my age when I thought the jokes were new. But I will have a shilling on every horse that has seven letters in its name, or if the jockey wears cerise, because it reminds me of something neither of you ought to hear; but if his colours are all cerise one pound sixteen shilling, and you will never know why, though I loved the man deeply; and if he hadn't been married, with three children, I don't know what mightn't have happened. Added to which, my dear, you don't want bones and parchment trying to push through a crowd of beer and muscle. I am one of those people who are old enough to know they are no longer young. Henry, you will be very important and perfectly useless; Rose, my dear one, take some toilet

vinegar and easy shoes. Bless you, I love you both."

The race-course was much as others are —crowds, bawling bookmakers, a hot grand stand, rows of carriages, and long lines of white rails.

Rose chattered on as if nothing had occurred between Pin and herself, marked her card, and sent Pin to put her money on. He, obedient to the turn of affairs, chattered gaily back, thinking all the time how much more lovely she was than any other woman there, and skilfully so at the right moment.

To the right of them, on the far side, was the water jump, by which they could see Henry standing with two other men. The fence was at the end of a downhill piece of straight, and after the jump the jockeys had to swerve their horses nearly at a right angle in order to take the last fence before the straight run to the winning post.

The cry, "They're off," banishes Cupid as sure as ducks are ducks. The roar from the crowd, "He's down." "He's up again." The view of the flash of colour as the jockeys

took the fences, the excitement when they were out of sight, took away a growing feeling of strain between Rose and Pin.

"Here they come." Down the hill they come, short by two, followed by a riderless horse. "Now for it!"

"But," Rose cried, "they aren't going to Henry's jump!"

"Not in the first two races," said Pin. "See, they turn now and take this fence. By George, Shallow Water's winning. Oh, pretty, pretty; well done, sir. She's won. Rose, you are my mascot; I followed you. Ten to one; come and get your money; it's rather fun."

They made their way to the bookmaker, and Rose, blushing delightfully, took her money from a perspiring man with a yellow top-hat and dyed whiskers.

"I've never won anything before," she said as she put the notes in her purse. "It doesn't seem fair to take money for something I hadn't anything to do with."

"Beginner's luck," Pin answered, laughing.

They saw the second race, and again the horse Rose fancied won, but this time at fifty to one. Pin got the money this time, and on reaching Rose he said, as he put the roll of notes into her bag, "Now what on earth made you back that horse? He'd no right to win; it was only because three of the others fell at the last fence."

"I knew a girl once," she said, "whose name was Lorna Derrick, and as the jockey's name was Derrick, I thought . . . why are you laughing?"

"Look at your card."

Then she began to laugh, too, and people turned to look at them. She had not marked the horse whose jockey's name was Derrick but one below.

After this came the first race to include three more jumps out of sight of the stand, and then the water jump.

"Here they come." Five horses almost abreast thundering down the hill; now for the jump! Over they go. Two bump and come down. The horse nearest to the rails jumps crooked to avoid the others, jumps

badly, throws his jockey, comes down and begins to kick. Henry rushes in, and, as the horse struggles to his feet, he gives a wild lash out and hits Henry fair and square on the head. Two horses clear the jump and go on. The crowd gather round the water jump.

"I must go to him, I must go to him," cried Rose. "Pin, get me to him."

Through the crowd they went, Pin forcing a way. On a hurdle men were carrying the crumpled form of the jockey. "Broken his neck," says one of the men as they pass by.

Henry lay there like a fallen tree, a doctor bending over him. "I am his wife," said Rose in a singularly calm voice. "Is he dead?"

"No," said the doctor. "He must have a head like iron, but he's bad, very bad." More men came this time with a stretcher.

"Will he recover?" Rose asked.

"No one can tell as yet," said the doctor. "But he looks a very strong man."

. . . . . .

They watched by his bedside all through

: afternoon, through the night until early
ning, when at about five o'clock he
ıed, opened his mouth—a terrible sight
is horribly swollen face—and whispered
ething they could not understand.
ater the doctor drew Pin aside. "You
to bed," he said. "That is the kind of
ı you can't kill."

CHAPTER XX

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

THE doctor decided that Henry must be taken to a nursing home just outside Queensbridge. "There is a wonderful old doctor there, who will look after him, and good nurses besides. Doctor Raglet is his name."

"But couldn't I look after him at home?" Rose pleaded.

"No," the doctor replied decidedly. "You are too far away from help and things he may need. Not that you have anything to worry about. There is one thing I may tell you, in several cases I know of, men have completely changed their outlook on life after a concussion of this kind. I remember, for instance, a very good clergyman who became a violent atheist on recovery; he left the church, and his simple life, and his wife

and children, for eight years, went to Australia and made a fortune. At the end of the eight years he had a severe illness, and on recovering from that he became reverted to his original beliefs, and went back to his wife. The curious part of the story is that he had no idea of what he had done in Australia; in fact, he was surprised to find himself there. Now which was the real man, good honest Christian, or the hard, alert financier?"

"But Henry is such a simple creature," she said.

"I do not believe there is such a person," the doctor answered. "No one knows what goes on in the queer melting pot of a man's mind. Bigamists have been really good husbands and fathers to two wives. Murderers have had happy homes, and people with plenty of money steal petty things for the excitement of the thing. That is the reason I want Raglet to look after your husband, he has made a study of suggestion. Tell the doctor Henry's story in detail, and if he sees him going astray while he comes

out of the shadowy world he lives in, he will suggest him back again."

So it came about that Henry lay in the house in Queensbridge, and Rose, Lady Angelina, and Pin took a small house there, the presiding genius of which was Martha, who felt she was living in the bustle and excitement of a city.

Martha, faithful servant, had been told the story of the accident, and it became the First, Second and Third Books of Accidents, when she recited it in other kitchens. You do not have the master of the house ill for nothing. He was somebody to be proud of. In a week or so it was bruited aboard that he had held the horse down with one hand, pulled the jockey from under him with the other, and that it was only while catching another jockey as he took his toss that the horse kicked him. Secretly she hoped he would have a very interesting scar.

In the two months they were in the little town, Rose and Pin were thrown much together. He never alluded to his love in words, but made love in deeds. They sat by

the bedside in silence, they walked in the town, hired a small boat, and sailed on the Belcombe River, which was really an arm of the sea.

Rose revealed to him the growth of her nature, her longings as a girl, her own version of the Prince Charming, of whom all girls dream as riding up the road of life towards them, and most women think of as having ridden by.

They hung the golden web of their thoughts in the golden sun of glamour and watched it gleam.

Doctor Raglet was a man of eyebrows, looking, if the expression may be used and kindly meant, like a clean-shaven sheep dog, the eyebrows testifying to the dog, and the face to the man. He had those clear, large, deep brown eyes, a hand like a confiding paw, and rugged white hair. Everyone wondered, every woman wondered why he had never married, not knowing that his wife was in a lunatic asylum. He and Lady Angelina were famous friends. "My dears," she said one day to Rose and Pin, "that man

couldn't tell a lie if he tried to, and if he did it would be the truth. I'd marry him to-morrow if he asked me."

"I believe he has," said Pin.

"A nice thing it would be to see an old dragon like me standing at the altar rails with that dear old bob-tailed dog; why he'd bark at the clergyman."

One evening the doctor was sitting in the garden with Lady Angelina, with his tankard of beer beside him, in a comfortable summer silence.

"Speak out, dear man," Lady Angelina said. "Henry is worse."

"No," said the doctor, "but he will be childish, I am afraid. The brain is a delicate thing. He probably will forget things in his past life; he does now when I talk to him. I have got him to remember that sweet girl is his wife, and that you and Pin are his friends."

"Childish," she repeated. "Henry childish, that great strong thing!"

"He will regain his health and his strength," said the doctor, "but he will

brood, he will seek to remember, and it will torture his mind. At present, and for months perhaps, he will be partly in the Valley of the Shadow, his vision will be under a cloud. A shock may bring everything back to him. Now I wonder whether it is wise that he should suffer that shock?" He turned his sad brown eyes on her and said: "You know what would cause that shock."

Lady Angelina hesitated, and the doctor continued:

"She is tender, gentle, she does everything she can, but she has eyes for no one but this enchanting devil."

"I love him," said Lady Angelina.

"Damn it, madam, so do I. He has been here nearly two months now, and there isn't a child who doesn't adore him, and the girls!" He threw up his hands. "Who shall say whether his is a good or evil gift? My life has been one of sorrow since my wife—I do not talk about this, but my dear wife has been in a lunatic asylum for forty years. God took her from me forty years ago, and

who shall say if it were for good or evil? I can say: 'God took her,' now with comfort and without hatred. A man, a passionate lover of hers, came from abroad and found her married to me. He shot himself in front of her eyes. I tell you this because I fear for Henry if he learns the truth, but I fear more for Pin."

"If Pin went away now I believe she would follow him," she said.

"It might leave Henry a happy, contented child, who did not quite understand, but, as is the way with children, he would grieve for a week or so and forget. He would make his iron gates, and probably live to a great age."

"I am wondering to myself if I am a moral woman," Lady Angelina said.

"Love," said the old doctor, "is such a very wonderful thing that it seems cruel to crush it, but there are a great many things to be considered. Fate, in the shape of this young man, has brought this girl the passion of her life, the intensity of their feelings glows about the pair of them. Ought we, ordinary

mortals ourselves, to take upon ourselves the destruction of this idyll? Into whose pool are we to throw our stone?"

"Are we to throw one at all?" said Lady Angelina. "Most tragedies happen from interference."

"The role of spectator is not an easy one in such a case."

"No," she answered, "but the role of judge is worse."

"Are we being very wrong?"

"I refuse to be like those people," she answered, "who pray for guidance when they have already made up their minds."

The old doctor rose, and bent over her hand in his courtly way. "And you do not feel, madam, that we are letting things slide?"

"Sir," said she curtly, "they have slid."

After the doctor had left, she sat with her hands before her, weighing the matter deeply. Was it just to Henry to condemn him to a vegetable existence? Was it right by a hint to allow him to come to life again

in such a terrible fashion, or right to say to Pin "Take Rose away now"?

In any case it seemed that all the quiet and joy had gone out of life, that, viewed either way, the rest of her life would be a tragedy. And the worst of it was for her, that she loved them all dearly, but Pin was the child of her heart.

She abandoned her thoughts, trusted in God, and went on with her knitting.

Meanwhile, Pin and Rose sat on a gate looking across a field, where the stooks of corn gleamed gold against the evening blue of the sky.

She was trying very earnestly to put her case before him. "It is over, dear," she said. "We could not leave him now."

"You love me?"

"More deeply, dear, than I ever thought I could love anybody."

"You never said so before."

"I shall never say so again, Pin, never if I have the strength. I shall leave the scar of my love always on my heart."

"If we love each other nothing else matters."

"There is Henry," she said.

"And there is me," he cried. "Am I nothing? Am I to be cast aside? Am I to go through life alone, mourning, while you, with your lifeless cold man, sit and weep silently? Now, listen to me; I, too, have plans for my life. Oh, darling, think of all the years, think of the things we are going to see and do, think of our love beautifying everything, helping everyone we meet. You and I will own this wonderful England, own its broad roads and placid rivers, its little lanes and swift small streams, and downs like lawns, and rock and heath and heather. The sun shall burn us, and the cool grey skies and gentle rain refresh us, and the trees shade us. The sea shall mirror clouds for us, and the wind raise up the pungent odours of the earth for us, the nightingale sob out his heart for us. Cakes and ale, my darling, in tree-embedded inns, and milk and eggs at farms, and no one, no one will scorn us, but

all England will know us as the perfect lovers."

She was in his arms, her lips trembling, her heart beating fast.

He spoke in a low, passionate whisper, as man has spoken to maid through the ages.

"I know what you would say, my little Puritan, and it begins: 'Whom God hath joined.' Has He not joined us, my rosebud, my perfect mate? Henry will be sore, his vanity will be hurt, but his wounds will heal."

"He loves me," she said, her head on Pin's shoulder.

"Henry, my dear, does everything a proper man should: he farms a bit, and is proud of his strength and his banking account, and he marries the most wonderful woman in the world, and there's an end of it. In life, my darling, there are always people who sit on committees and make rules; now you and I make no rules, we are our own rule. You can't make rules for birds, 'No singing after eight.' Can you imagine it? Those people

make rules to be dull. 'Nightingales please note that they are requested to keep off the oak tree nearest the vicarage, their singing upsets the vicar's conscience.' 'Bracken fronds will kindly uncurl earlier this year to oblige those who are forced to take their holidays in March.' No, my dear, no, those are the people who hang up texts on their walls because their hearts don't hold them."

"What am I to do?" she said.

"Leave everything to me. When Henry is well and back at his work again, I shall come one day and tell you everything is ready; bring nothing, prepare nothing. I will attend to everything. Two horses, two packs, and the world is ours. No laws: when we are hungry we will eat, thirsty we will drink, watch the night through, and sleep in the day if we want to; if we are to dress ourselves up to see that grim spectre civilisation calls 'Life' we will dress better than all the rest. Their majesties the vagabonds, that is what we shall be."

"Shan't we have a house?"

"Woman!"

"But I am one."

"Of course we shall have a house," said Pin. "We shall have the finest house in England, even if it has only two rooms and a kitchen. And we'll have our own robin, and a thrush, and a particular star to look in at the window, and a pot of musk, and a black cat, and a French maid who speaks English perfectly and cooks in French."

"Shall we be very happy?" Rose asked dreamily.

"We shall be so happy that all the flowers will say 'Good morning' to us because they will be so surprised, and all the birds will say 'Good night' to us because they will be so delighted. There! England, allow me to introduce you to the queen, who happens to own France and Italy, and heaps of other places."

Then, and not till then, did he kiss her. And the golden harvest moon shone like the lamp of inspiration on them, for it was harvest and the fruits of the earth were ripe.

CHAPTER XXI

NOT ALL THERE

IT is not to be wondered at that natives of many countries regard a man bereft of his wits as being a "God's Fool," a creature set apart and possessed of peculiar qualities. Many a white man in the East has owed his life to a successful imitation of a lunatic.

Henry persisted in the idea that Pin was Mr. Frogmore. He stood up when Pin entered the room, called him "sir," handed him blank pieces of paper which were supposed to be accounts, then suddenly in the midst of such a scene he would laugh and then relapse into silence.

His health was wonderful, and his strength returned quickly, but his eyes were vacant, though on occasion he seemed to be struggling to come out of his closed life story, and then he would stammer and the

tears come into his eyes, and afterwards he would fall into a heavy sleep.

He became Daft Henry to the village, but the children were not frightened of him, and often he might have been seen with half a dozen of them, throwing stones into the sea from the beach, or building elaborate castles.

During all this time no word of love passed between Pin and Rose, all attention was paid to Henry; indeed the pain of seeing him thus afflicted was too great for them to do other than attend to his whims.

Pin was the one person to whom Henry paid deference. "Command me, sir," he would say, and nerve-wracking though it was, Pin played the part of Mr. Frogmore to perfection. Together, and by the hour, they corrected the famous speech which was never spoken in public, but which was now spoken with terrible earnestness almost daily. "If it is your pleasure, sir," Henry would say, "I venture to suggest an alteration in these lines. 'No fairer flower could England show' to 'England could show no fairer flower.' Do you agree, sir?"

And Pin would agree or suggest, "England. No fairer flower could show than——" until sometimes he had to bite his lips to hold in his agony of boredom.

What a position for a man, to nurse his enemy and coax him to be his friend, all the while he was waiting to steal his wife.

Lady Angelina was the barometer of the situation; she learned every note of Henry's voice, every wince of Pin's, saw every inch of the battle Rose was fighting.

It was pitiful to see those three people centring their world on this magnificent creature with a clouded brain. Martha was happy; she fed him, she was near enough to the animals to understand. Henry, to her, was a large nice dog who was a little fussy about his food, and he was then near enough to the animals to prefer the cook who comforted his tummy.

He worked at the forge and made the best horseshoes in the country; shy birds, like blackbirds, the shyest of them all fed from his hand: they knew.

Henry grew a beard and asked everybody

about it every day. It made him look like a Viking, that together with his shirt open at the neck, and his great chest and enormous arms, but it was heart-breaking to see nothing but a wondering child look out of his eyes. He never smoked now, but ate sweets greedily, and the village children well knew he kept his pockets full of them.

So autumn went by, displaying all her extravagant beauty, discovering new tints of copper and gold, new veils of mist, new dances for the falling leaves, and then the apples from the apple loft were crisp to eat, and blue flames arrived in fires and it was winter. Autumn the painter, Winter the etcher, drawing with her burin the architecture of trees against grey skies.

In January, one clear, beautiful morning, Henry was sitting out of doors with Lady Angelina, when he said quite suddenly: "Is there another world?"

She answered: "Yes, dear, and very beautiful."

Said Henry: "I have lived in it, I think, and there was a woman in it, with a name

like a flower. I knew her, I think. I was happy. I have had a pain in my head for a long time, but it is going, I think."

He relapsed into silence for a long time, and then he looked at Lady Angelina with his eyes filled with wonder and said, "You were there, too. Oh, God, help me."

The moment was over, it was as if a curtain had been drawn aside and drawn across the window again. But in that moment Lady Angelina made her decision.

"Rose, Pin," she said that afternoon. "One day, not so very distant, Henry is going to recover his reason, at what precise moment no one can tell. Is there going to be any precise moment when he might be plunged into hell for ever?"

"Who shall say at what moment a bud may open?" said Pin.

Then Rose broke in with a sweeping gesture, "Why should I be made to choose, why should I be the pivot of this—this tragic business? Does Henry want me, mother, or am I here to see to his comforts, hear about his committees, nurse his ailments? I

have failed him as a wife, I know. I have borne him no children. I am too simple for fine folks, and too proud. Henry's is a man's life which includes a woman as part of the outfit; I need a woman's life which is shared with a man. Until now, until this moment, I did not know I had chosen. I have chosen. I am young, and I claim my youth. I want freedom."

"Freedom," said Lady Angelina, "is the slavery of a monomaniac in this case. I shall stay with Henry. Leave him a little longer in this state so that his cure may be gradual. I will warn you. Oh, my dears, must this thing be?"

"My very much loved lady," said Pin, going close to her, taking her hand, "is not life so great that one cannot guide it to one's own well-liking? If we hurt this man we truly do him a service, in that he will know he is not living in what would be a daily deceit. He will come out of his dreams to find something still missing out of his past life, and in the end he will bury it under the tender flowers of memory. Rose and I are

not seeking the approval of a world which will say I have betrayed my friend when he could not help himself. Do you think," he went on quietly, "that we shall be thinking of that narrow world and its twopenny approvals and disapprovals. We shall be like the founders of a new tribe making our own laws, seeking our own path through life and finding it, my God, in love and not in litanies. We will wait, Rose and I, until you bid us go, before the blindness falls from this poor man whom, it may surprise you, I deeply respect. We shall write to you, both of us, from here, there, everywhere, because our love for you will always be part of our lives. The world, which starves itself because it is afraid to love, will judge our action harshly: it will say Rose made her bed and so she must lie upon it, which is a proverb invented to excuse laziness. It will say we have ruined Henry's life, whereas any other action would ruin three lives. It will say I am the vilest of the vile, because I stole my friend's wife, but something greater than this censorious

world has so fashioned this affair that Rose and I are set apart.

"How many marriages have you known, Lady Angelina, but that are full of concealed infidelities, possibly only of thought? How many happy people do you meet? How many people sit in the eternal grey of compromise and allow the golden hours to go swiftly by, mourning when they need not mourn, giving no comfort, having none to give?"

"This is dangerous doctrine, Pin," said Lady Angelina.

He was talking as much for Rose's benefit as for his own, to state his case, to show his purpose and his creed.

"Let those," he went on, standing now by Rose, yet not touching her, "who care to clank their chains and say they love that music best, clank on. I do not advocate this theory of mine for everyone; there are cloistered minds, and there are minds who fight shy of life and drag themselves into domesticity; there are noble minds who seek to better men's conditions; but of great hearts

there are very few; people who own a kingdom of smiles, warmth spreading out and sometimes shining in on the prisoners and helping a day to pass, or an hour to pass while love beats laws and faded flowers are taken out and kissed."

This scene had been enacted in the little parlour, and they were standing there when Henry's great frame filled the doorway. His face was as happy as a child's and he said, "I have great news for you, Mr. Frogmore and ladies, wonderful news."

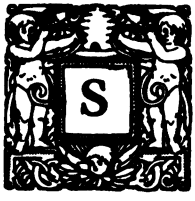
Looking at him, so radiant, so handsome, made Rose put her hands over her heart as if he could see it beating and guess.

One of Henry's hands was behind his back, now he brought it forward. "See," he cried proudly, "the first snowdrop!"

It was as if a child had come into the room.

CHAPTER XXII

LIGHT



PRING touched the earth with her tender fingers, and in the Happy Valley came the bluebells and primroses and the young leaves of trees and new blades of grass. And Henry changed. He became stealthy, silent, sat by himself by the hour. They noticed traces of grey in his hair, a drawn expression in his face, nervous twitchings of his hands.

Then one day he insisted upon going into Exeter alone, and returned with his face clean shaven, which showed them deep lines about his mouth.

On the following day Pin left the house after a consultation with Rose. As he was going Lady Angelina drew him aside. "Pin," she said, "something terrible is hap-

pening to that man; his eyes are the eyes of a madman sometimes, and sometimes they are blank and vacant as if all thought had gone from him. You know how people are said to wrestle with the devil; I think that is what he is doing. Have you absolutely made up your mind, Pin?"

"Absolutely."

"My dear, you are a different man, too."

"I have my great love. It fills me with awe sometimes, the feeling that I need her so. If she were to say, 'It were better that you drown yourself,' I would do so, dearly as I love life."

She led him to the gate which opened into the Happy Valley and bade him look down and see the quiet beauty there. "I am an old woman, my dear," she said. "I, too, have changed. I look down this valley and wonder if I shall ever see spring or happiness again."

He took her in his arms and kissed her impulsively. "You are an old darling," he said.

"That's the old Pin," she said wistfully.

"There is the child in all of us, thank God.

"Then, dear, you understand there is the mother in all of us. I have not appealed to you, my dear, dear boy, for my own sake; I do now. I love you better than anybody I have ever known, and so I am prepared to sacrifice you. Go away, and never, never come back. And that means I sacrifice myself, too. You and I, dear, are cast in a different mould to the others. This great love of yours is only a payment of the dream we call life. The passionate endeavour always means the passionate disappointment. I have loved a hundred men and thought them each one perfect, but I love the memory of their imperfections more. Men come into women's lives meaning so many things—position, an escape, money, a chance of power, as an adventure, as a stolen kiss and a life-long tender memory of it, as companions, sometimes as a mere relief from spinsterhood; but, Pin dear, it is the give-and-take man who wins and makes the woman happy. If people don't quarrel on their honeymoon there is no chance for their

future happiness, because married happiness is complete understanding.

"Don't take her away, Pin. Nature, this valley, God will restore the balance. She is Henry's wife; or, if you prefer it, they owe something to each other. You are the passionate interruption which comes, I think, into every woman's life."

"I love her," said Pin, with mouth set firm.

"Weave it into your story, dear. Rose will not make you happy; I can say that to you because I am an old woman who loves you."

He pressed her hand so that her rings hurt her. "I am trying to find ordinary words," he said. "In times like these it is never easy to find ordinary words. I adore England, the country of England; Rose is England to me all gathered up into one woman. I have held England in my arms, if you understand me; and beyond that I have held that supreme mystery, a woman with whom I am at one. My personality merges into hers. We are as one person. If I am without her half of me dies." He swung round,

and his voice had a note of triumph, "I don't care a damn for Henry; I don't care if he goes mad, or dies, or suffers. I care simply with the man and savage in me for her. I cling to her. In these cases there is no right or wrong, as in Nature, where there is no right or wrong. And when you see our children you will be proud of us."

"Pin, dear, Rose is very house-proud. There are things you sort of men never think of—linen cupboards, and weekly accounts, and ready reckoners for servants' wages, and the look in the eyes of neighbours. Do you see yourself a father carving the Sunday joint and watching the baby being powdered? Do you see yourself discussing the drunken cook, or finding out that the gardener sells your vegetables and fruit? Hum-drum, dear, is a bogey we can't set aside, and one day he will come along, and one day poor wild Pin will have to pay the rates and taxes."

"I have a secretary," he said, smiling.

"You with a secretary! Oh, Pin! What is he—a burglar with a nice face?"

"He is the most, the very most respectable young man in all England. He can spell, which I can't; and he dresses badly in quite good clothes."

"I give you up, Pin," she said, smiling despite her feelings.

"Honestly and seriously," he said, "I am going to carry this through. Trust a lover; Nature looks after him. Now I am going, but never think that I do not cherish all your sweetness and love for me, unworthy as I am."

For a moment she put her old arms about his neck, looked deeply into his eyes, and said, "God be with you, my son. I do not understand."

And his answer was this: "The man who is secure in his love has heaps to give away to other people."

He met Rose a little way down the valley, and told her he was off and away to get everything ready. She clung to him fearfully, kissing him, trusting him, yet scarcely trusting herself to speak; and when he gently put her away and left her she watched

him down the valley and felt the light had gone out of her life. Little did they know that crouched down behind a bush of gorse Henry lay hidden, watching them, hearing every word.

He lay there, snuffling at the grass and biting it like an animal; the heavy scent of the gorse intoxicated him so that his nostrils dilated and he flung his head from side to side. The light had come to him after all these months. There was a taste of blood in his mouth, a singing in his ears; but his brain was clear at last. All his thoughts and vague memories sorted themselves out pitilessly. The hints became facts in their proper order; indeed, more clearly than to an ordinary man suggestions, or what had been suggestions, marshalled themselves in precise order.

Murder.

There was nothing else for it: these people must die. Out of the confused brain came a sanity that was madness in itself. To kill was almost a joyous thought. To strike at the right moment; to meet them at their

guilty rendezvous, to accuse them in a few clear words, and then to strike, and strike. Down they would go, the guilty lovers. Something stronger than the scent of gorse met his nostrils, as, like an ox in passionate fury, he heaved; his nose was bleeding, and the sweet, sticky smell of blood rejoiced him.

That man, that seducer of women, should be battered to pulp, and then that beautiful false face of his wife would turn black as he strangled her.

As he lay there, his great shoulders heaving, he was proud of his strength; nothing was left to him but his strength, and he gloried in it.

The vapours of months were swept away, and, alone in the valley, he laughed aloud, hideously, long, thinking what they would look like when they saw the avenging angel with his blacksmith's hammer poised above him.

He snarled like a beast, and his teeth were bared, and the sweat dripped from his face, and he smelt it mingle with the blood with pleasure—awful demoniacal pleasure.

It was over two hours before he realised that he must take a hold on himself, and he planned that he would ape his former softness until just the moment when he raised his arm to kill. The primitive in him took control; like a savage, his mind worked cunningly. The consequence of his premeditated act never worried him. He had, in fact, a mind only half awakened, and that half inspired with one single thought—those people must die by his hand at the very moment when they were departing on their new life.

That night at supper he watched Lady Angelina and Rose furtively, seeming still to be as blank in mind as before. Memories flooded his thoughts, so that he sat that night nearly silent lest he should betray himself. He even wondered what Rose would look like dead.

So deadly clear was his brain that everything stood out in sharp outlines and black shadows like drawings in pen and ink: Mr. Frogmore, the office, the first meeting with Rose, tiny trifles of his childhood, a proces-

sion of thoughts with a definite end—the death of those who had betrayed him. Once or twice he moaned as a dog does in nightmare.

After supper, and without a word, he went to the forge and blew up the smouldering fire. Taking a bar of iron, he heated it and set it on the anvil white hot, and beat it into a thin ribbon with his heaviest hammer. Rose, who came to see what he was doing, had no idea that she was present at a rehearsal.

Henry turned and saw her framed in the doorway, her face lit on one side by the fire and on the other by the moonlight, the night sky and the blue-black branch of a tree for background. The thought came to him to kill her then, but a curious thing saved her life. The day before, a stray puppy had decided to live with them, a fat puppy of indeterminate parentage. The ridiculous creature took this very moment to plunge in with a rolling gait and to make a tremendous onslaught on one of Henry's legs. Rose laughed, and something akin to a cool hand

rested on Henry's brain. He set down his hammer, pushed past her, the puppy at his heels, and went out into the night.

That same fat, bouncing puppy, that strange arbiter of Fate, emissary from the gods, that real expression of the comic spirit, followed the stricken man and gave vent to halfpenny growls and high-pitched barks and saved Henry's reason. Nature uses odd remedies; Henry found himself cuddling the baby animal, who licked his face and put a black, wet nose against his cheek, and somehow the deliciously silly behaviour of the beast and the aromatic smell all puppies have gave Henry a peace of mind. Not that it diverted his ultimate purpose, but it distracted his immediate attention, else Rose and Lady Angelina would have known no to-morrow in this world.

A week passed, and Pin returned.

A phrase of the theatre escaped Henry at dinner, at which they all wondered. He said aloud: "Kindly be seated by eight o'clock because the action of the play commences as the curtain rises."

Following their amazement, Henry said, "I was only thinking how like life is to literature."

This set Pin thinking.

CHAPTER XXIII

ENCHANTMENT OF PINDAR WILLOUGHBY

AWN, five o'clock, was to be the time, so Pin told Rose. Everything was ready, the two horses were even now tethered in the Happy Valley under the oak trees, the packs were there, and they would mount and ride down the road away to the kingdom of all true lovers.

Down on the beach they settled it with the endless song of the sea in their ears, with the stars splashed about the sky, with the calm moon riding the heavens, with two people listening—Henry, with bloodshot eyes and dark hair, and the bad woman, Sarah Trapan.

By what instinct she knew, by what gipsy premonition, Sarah herself could not tell. But she did know, her sixth sense told her.

When she saw the two figures she was not in the least surprised. The sea drowned the sound of her footsteps as she crept near enough, but she was surprised when her night-seeing eyes caught sight of Henry. In a moment she sensed him, he was like a tiger watching his prey.

"At dawn, at five o'clock, my darling," Pin was saying. "And then away, and then for ever and for ever. No one, no thing shall ever take you from me, not even death, for if you die I shall die too. If death takes me first, all my money is yours. I have seen to that. I have done such a lot of practical things that I am almost persuaded the business world has lost a great financier. I shall publish a book called 'Pin's Hundred Best Stories about Solicitors,' and you shall have the first copy bound in ten-pound notes. Don't cry. We aren't doing anything wrong, we are only doing what Nature tells us, just as she tells barley to bow politely to the wind. There, that's right, smile. The moon makes your dimples sweeter. The stars and the sea are marrying us with this

long sweet beach for bishop. I have even brought you a ring. It is made of hairs from the tail of your mare, and it took me hours to plait it. She is a chestnut and a beauty. They are making friends now, our horses, under the oak trees. I have called her Romance, and mine Adventure, and they answer to their names. Sleep to-night, my love, and wake with the dawn, sweetly dazed as children are in waking, fists to the eyes, and a lazy yawn, when cats yawn you see how red their tongues are, and they crinkle up their eyes just as children do. Trust me, my pretty. Don't let those two great drops stand in your eyes, you are wasting pearls. Oh, if ever man loved, I do. Now to bed, listen to the practical man talking. That brown dress of yours, plenty of handkerchiefs, and your woman's secrets in a little bag, and then—then, Rose, we shall know the great, great story of life at last."

What instinct made Sarah do the right thing she will never know or care. She saw Rose leave alone, and followed her. Pin stood silent, outlined against the sky.

"If he kills 'im, he kills 'im, and that's all about it," Sarah thought.

She could walk like a cat, and came up to Rose and whispered, "Don't speak, lass."

And she took Rose by the arm, and then round the waist, and led the trembling figure to her cottage. "You're going to sleep between my two babies to-night, my deeur, and you'll bide there till I come for 'ee. Tidn't no use arguing with me, lass, because for two-pence I'd rope 'ee down, but them two angels is better ropes nor what I got. I've guessed long since, and to-night I heard. Now the spell's off you. Lord, my duck."

She put her great strong brown arms about the dazed girl and drew her to her big warm bosom, and Rose suddenly put her head on the bad woman's shoulder and cried her heart out.

"There now, my love, tidn't so bad's all that," she said, soothing her hair and face with her toil-worn hand. "There now, take off your pretty things while I fetch you a clean shift. I've got things to do come dawn."

Rose was at the end of her tether, and she obeyed the strong sweet woman who had come so miraculously to help her. She knew that what she had been about to do was wrong, and somehow this woman had made her know it without a word.

When Sarah returned Rose was standing shyly in her chemise, with a look of entreaty on her face, an unspoken plea not to be scolded.

"There, my pretty," said Sarah, holding out a garment. " 'Tis coarse, but 'tis clean. Why you'm naught but a child, pink and lovely too. Slip it on, deeur, I'm not looking."

Rose put on the long white nightdress of bleached calico and turned to Sarah.

"What am I to do?" she said.

To her surprise, Sarah sat down and beckoned to her. " 'Twouldn't do 'ee any harm to kneel down same as my other children do. They goes to sleep the better for their prayers. Then sharp to bed, love."

Rose knelt as she was bidden and looked

up at her fine, fiercely beautiful face. "What will he do?" she asked.

"He'll likely ride away," Sarah answered. "Get on with your prayers."

"I can't pray."

"Then I will," said Sarah firmly. "God give us both Thy love and help. That's enough for to-night."

She led the unresisting girl to the humble bedroom, wakened the children, and said to them, "See what mother's brought for a present," placed Rose between them, kissed her, and went out.

Lady Angelina spent that night in agony, she knew the crisis had come, and she knew she was utterly useless. She prayed, read, and finally left her bed and sat waiting for the day. Just before dawn she slept in her chair and never heard Henry go into the forge.

Pin was in the Happy Valley, sitting and waiting. He had an uneasy feeling that he was being watched, which he was, not a hundred feet away from him Sarah sat waiting also.

Pin was a boy again, he did not know how, but his mind would fasten itself on bird-nesting. He could see those cream-coloured eggs with the brown scrawl on them of the scribbling lark, and the little blue eggs, shell-blue, not like any other blue, of the hedge sparrow. He remembered exactly where he had found them, and when. He wondered where his stamp collection was; he had a scrap album, not a proper stamp book, and he had written the names of the countries in his untidy schoolboy scrawl. Youth came over him as a garment, and with the memories of youth came dawn, and with dawn came reason.

Leading both horses, Pin walked down the valley and away, alone, into the world. The grass shone with millions of Nature's diamonds of the purest water; the grey of the morning developed slowly into colour; one bird singing started the morning hymn of the others; a cock crowed.

A force stronger than anything Pin had ever known led him away; it was a soothing force; it was as if something so powerful,

yet so gentle in power, took him by the hand. The clarity, the vision of youth, the morning purity led him. A little breeze sighed in the trees, that was all. Passion departed. Nothing Pin did that morning was of his own free will. Are there guardian angels? Yes.

Sarah sat there waiting, listening for the footsteps she expected. The roseate light filtered through the trees before her quick ears heard those footsteps. Staggering, they were like those of a drunken man.

She prepared to meet Death quite simply, expecting to be killed, and her thought was of Rose and her own two babies.

He came, his shirt torn down to the waist, his hair matted with sweat, his eyes blazing. In his right hand he held his forge hammer. Then she stepped forward and he saw her.

"What do you be doing here?" Sarah asked in a calm voice.

"Get out of my way," Henry said. "No, wait. You, you she-devil, you are in this."

"Of course I be," she answered.

For an instant the hammer swung aloft,

was held above her, dropped. He seized her wrist.

"Where are they?" he said. "Tell me or I'll kill you."

"One's gone away," she said without flinching, "and t'other's here."

His breath was hot on her face as his burning eyes looked into hers. "Tell me, you abandoned woman, where are they?"

"I sent him away," she answered. "I wouldn't go with him after all."

"You!" said Henry, dropping her hand and using his own to mop the sweat from his face.

"I saw you spying on us last night down to the beach," said Sarah. "And before that, too. Who else did you think to find here?"

"Rose," he answered in a dazed way, and the forge hammer fell to the ground.

"You'm daft," she answered. "All village knows that."

The fire had gone out of his eyes and a look of questioning came into them.

"I saw her on the beach last night, I swear I saw her."

"So you did," Sarah answered. "You great fule. 'Twas she came to persuade me not to go. And you'll find her not far off the beach now, asleep in bed between my two babies."

With a groan he fell on his knees and put his hands over his face.

Sarah put her hand on his head.

"You know my character, don't 'ee? Well, I was nearly a bad woman again."

So she left him and walked up the Happy Valley with a troubled look on her face. "I hope the Lord will forgive me," she said to herself. "I've never told a lie before."

THE END

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